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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Modern English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English Dictionary by Uriel Weinreich

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## BOOK REVIEWS

MODERN ENGLISH-YIDDISH, YIDDISH-ENGLISH DICTIONARY. By Uriel Weinreich. New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968. Pp. xliii+790+(10). \$18.

A reviewer often writes of a book that it "fills a gap," when he actually means that the book fills that gap better than most other books. The book under review fills a gap in the absolute sense: until the late Uriel Weinreich's English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English dictionary appeared there was simply no single place to go for the information assembled here between two covers; and it's hard to imagine a difficult job of useful dictionary-making performed better than this.

The book is intended to serve two language audiences with different needs. There is a set of "Guidelines" for the English user, but the title is inadequate: besides directions for using the dictionary there are brief but rather complete sketches of Yiddish spelling and morphology. The corresponding "Oyfklerungen" in Yiddish at the opposite end of the book do not, of course, include a grammar sketch. It is clear that English speakers reading Yiddish will need and use this dictionary more than Yiddish speakers reading English, and this shows up in the relative number of entries: I estimate the Yiddish-English entries outnumber the English-Yiddish ones by twenty-five percent (there are more than 20,000 Yiddish-English entries, considerably more if one counts compounds).

Since Yiddish is spelled in Hebrew characters right-to-left, reading the English alongside a Yiddish entry requires more than a little practice. The problem is necessarily compounded by the abbreviated grammatical markings (principally genders, plurals, participles, parts of speech, and usage levels) that accompany each entry. There is no very good way to handle the problem of right-to-left and left-to-right languages in the same dictionary, and Weinreich made the best of an impossible task. Pages xiii-xx explain the system, and these pages must be read before using the dictionary.

The great problem for anyone who didn't grow up with Yiddish is the spelling and pronunciation of words of Hebrew-Aramaic origin. As is well known, such words are spelled vowelless (except in post-revolutionary Russian Yiddish), and the spelling does not tell the neophyte reader which vowels to supply. The only previous Yiddish-English dictionary of any size, Alexander Harkavy's *English-Yiddish Dictionary* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1891), is simply useless here, besides being about as current for modern Yiddish as Dr. Johnson is for modern English. Other aids, such as Nakhman Krupin's *Hantbukh fun hebreizmen in der yidisher shprakh* (Buenos Aires: IUCF, 1957) or Yankev Levin's *Verterbikh fun hebreish-yidishe verter* (New York: CYCO, 1958), are useful but virtually unknown to the people who need them most, and both are unsatisfactory to varying degrees; neither marks stress, for example. Weinreich gives the pronunciation and stress of all Hebrew-Aramaic words, which alone makes his dictionary indispensable for most of us. Unfortunately, he does not include proper names like *Shmuel* and *Rokhl*, the pronunciations of which must be memorized. This is a minor but

unnecessary omission that should be and easily could be corrected in the future reprintings this dictionary deserves.

Another addition helpful to the user of the dictionary would be a summary of the kinds of deviant orthographic practices one encounters in contemporary and nineteenth-century Yiddish publications. Weinreich, of course, uses the Yiddish orthography standardized in 1936 under the aegis of YIVO (originally, Yiddish Scientific Institute; now, Institute for Jewish Research). Readers of scholarly journals (e.g., *Yidische shprakh*, *Di goldene keyt*) will find only this orthography, but the bulk of contemporary printing differs in various ways from the standard usage.

Furthermore, if an English speaker knowing no Yiddish learns the language the usual way—namely, from Uriel Weinreich's *College Yiddish* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1949; 4th rev. ed., 2nd printing, 1966), he will know only the standard orthography. Reading nonstandard orthography is not an overwhelming problem, but it does want experience. Nonstandard orthographic practice can easily be summarized—a good start is made in Meyer Kshenski, "Korekter un fargrayzter oysleyg in der yidisher prese" (*Yugntruf*, VIII [1967], 9)—and the dictionary would be improved by an excursus on such usage.

To all of us concerned with Yiddish in one way or another, no scholarly contribution comes as a more welcome gift than this convenient and reliable dictionary. And no man was better fitted for bestowing this gift than Uriel Weinreich. For this, and so much else, the scholarly world owes him lasting gratitude that now, with a profound sense of loss, can only be expressed as praise for his legacy.

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HISTORICAL GERMAN SYNTAX. By W. B. Lockwood. London: Oxford University Press, 1968. Pp. xii+279. \$7.

Professor Lockwood's book is the first volume of the Oxford History of the German Language under the general editorship of C. T. Carr. It is, according to the author's statement in the Preface, primarily intended for English-speaking students of German. The arrangement of the data resembles that of Ingerid Dal's *Kurze deutsche Syntax*. The eleven chapters deal with: nouns, with their various cases as subdivisions (pp. 1-36); adjectives (pp. 37-49); adverbs (pp. 50-52); pronouns (pp. 53-85); articles (pp. 86-98); verbs (pp. 99-173); prepositions (pp. 174-197); concord (pp. 198-206); negation (pp. 207-213); clause combination (pp. 214-255); word-order (pp. 256-76). There are no indices of subjects or words treated; only an alphabetical list of quoted authors or works with their dates (pp. 277-279). Among the Old High German sources in this list the *Hildebrandslied* is assigned to the "mid-8th century," both the Wessobrunn Prayer and Exhortatio ad plebem christianum to the "second half of the 8th century." Such early dates could not even be quite correct as composition dates, not to mention the manuscript dates: for example, the Exhortatio must have been written after the publication of the Admonitio generalis of 789.

There is no bibliography at the end; there are altogether only five incom-