The Religious Prestige of the Gaon and the Secular Prestige of Lithuanian Yiddish

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A story of subtle links

One of the symbolic "miracles of Yiddish" is its standard pronunciation, agreed upon by the majority of Yiddish scholars and teachers, and widely put into effect in Yiddish school systems in pre-war Eastern Europe (non-Soviet and Soviet alike) and in Yiddish outposts around the world, including those in North and South America, Western Europe, Australia, and South Africa.

This pronunciation is popularly called *Litvish* ('Lithuanian'). Like many popular conceptions about language, it is largely, though not absolutely correct. The standard is extremely close to the sound system of Lithuanian Yiddish, the dialect spoken on the territory of what is today Lithuania, Belarus, and Latvia with some additional bits and pieces in the adjoining countries. And, it is much further from the southern dialects.

The "miraculous status" of the standard pronunciation results not from anything inherent in its structure, but from a number of socio-political factors. These include: the widespread agreement on its status (itself a sort of miracle in Yiddish stylistics, where heated debates continue on spelling, lexicon and other matters), and primarily, the fact that a standard emerged and was implemented around the world for a controversial, embattled, minority language that was not in power anywhere, and could not rely on

the forces of government school systems, national language academies or any of the other mechanisms by which standards are enforced for "languages with armies and navies."

The standard flies right in the face of demography. The *Litvaks*, Jews who speak Lithuanian Yiddish, comprised between a fourth and a third of the Yiddish speaking population of the historical teritory of Yiddish in Eastern Europe (principally comprising, before World War I, the Pale of Settlement within the Russian Empire, and large chunks of the Austro-Hungarian empire).

The standard pronunciation is part of a larger picture. The secular Yiddish culture movement – Yiddishism – succeeded from the late nineteenth century onward in building for the folk language of East European Jewry many of the trappings of the modern national languages of Europe: sophisticated *belles lettres*, scientific literature, school systems, newspapers, networks of schools at many levels and much more. These achievements, including Isaac Bashevis Singer's Nobel Prize in 1978, are a testament to the mighty creative power of the East European Jewish folk language revised as a major national language of the Jewish people.

The adoption of the "Lithuanian standard" came as a symbolic clincher of the national Jewish (if non-territorial) majesty of Yiddish. When Ber Borokhov (1881–1917), the founder of modern Yiddish linguistics, came to publish his classic "Aims of Yiddish Philology" (in a trail-blazing academic anthology, *Der pinkes*, that appeared in Vilna in 1913) he wrote, in an addendum on the standardization of Yiddish spelling: "I take the pronunciation of the district of Vilna to be the basis" (Borokhov 1913: 18). And so, with breathtaking speed, a language with no country acquired its own symbolic capital – Vilna (Vilnius).

In the interbellum period, Max Weinreich (1894–1969), co-founder of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, was able to declare that Standard Yiddish Pronunciation was virtually a fact of life in the circles of modern Yiddish culture. In Yiddish school systems in America and elsewhere, the Lithuanian based standard was so accepted, that teachers hailing from other parts of the Yiddish speaking territory hastened to modify their pronunciation in the direction of the Lithuanian dialect (M. Weinreich 1934: 281–282).

Western Yiddish (mostly on German speaking territory) had, with few exceptions, long gone under as the language of viable speech communities. All modern Yiddish is Eastern Yiddish (coterritorial with the Slavonic and Baltic languages). Eastern Yiddish comprises three major dialects: Mideas-

tern (popularly known as "Polish" Yiddish), Southeastern ("Ukrainian") and Northeastern ("Lithuanian").

The following table summarizes some salient differences between the vowel systems of the three dialects and the standard, using a single everyday word to illustrate each vowel.

Mideastern ("Polish")	Southeastern ("Ukrainian")	Northeastern ("Lithuanian")	Standard	*gloss*
kímen	kímen	kúmen	kúmen	'come'
zugn	zugn	zogn	zogn	'say'
va:n	van	vayn	vayn	'wine'
béyget	béyged/biged	béged	béged	'garment'
hant	ont	hant	hant	'hand'
khayn	kheyn	kheyn	kheyn	'grace'
oyk	oyg	eyg	oyg	'eye'

It is presently evident, that Lithuanian *is* in fact the standard, with the exception of the famous "Lithuanian *ey*" for Standard *oy*. It is well known to Yiddish folklorists, for example, that the shift of *oy* to *ey* led to the merger of *vóynen* 'live, dwell' with *véynen* 'cry'. To avoid using a word that means 'cry' as well as 'live', Vilna Jews would characteristically ask *Vu fréyste zikh* (literally 'Where do you rejoice?') when they wanted to ask somebody 'Where do you live?' The Jews of Pinsk (where the Yiddish is every bit as Lithuanian as in Vilna), resolved the ambiguity by invoking *Vu lakhstu?* (literally 'Where do you laugh?'), to ask someone's address.

The formula "Standard Yiddish pronunciation is *Litvish* minus that *ey* that corresponds to *oy* in the other dialects" is largely accurate, although not entirely so. The Northeastern Yiddish collapse of hushing and hissing consonants, giving rise to the so-called *sábesdiker lósn* ('Sabbath language', a phrase with two sh [=š] in the standard language – *shabesdik loshn*), is non-standard as can be. (On the history of that classic Lithuanian Yiddish phenomenon, see U. Weinreich, 1952). Even in the vowel system, there are local Lithuanian features that are non-standard (e.g. epenthesis of *y* to resolve hiatus of consecutive vowels, cf. some Northeastern *tóyes* 'mistake' for standard *tóes*). These "exceptions on the fringes" do not undermine the notion of the Lithuanian based standard pronunciation. To the contrary, their paucity only serves to underscore the degree to which the "formula" (Lithuanian minus "that *ey*") is essentially accurate.

This formula was proclaimed even before Borokhov by the earliest modern Yiddish linguists to emerge from the ranks of East European Jew-

ry, among them Ludwik Zamenhof (1859–1917), better known as the inventor of Esperanto. Zamenhof, author of a Yiddish grammar, had proposed the Latinization of Yiddish writing in some sensational pieces signed "Dr X," published in 1909 and 1910 in the popular scientific journal *Lebn un visnshaft* which appeared in Vilna. In the first of those pieces, Zamenhof speaks of choosing Lithuanian Yiddish as the standard because it is "more pure [!] and regular" (Zamenhof, 1909: 54). In formulating his proposed rules for writing Yiddish in the Latin alphabet, he likewise expressed himself as a *litvak* (and Byalistok, his hometown, is of course part of the territory of Lithuanian Yiddish): "to always write according to the pronunciation of the Lithuanian Jews; in those instances, however, where it is difficult [!] for the Lithuanian Jews to differentiate *ey* and *oy*, the Polish dialect must be taken into consideration. For example, the Lithuanian Jews pronounce almost [!] identically the words *broyt* ['bread'] and *breyt* ['wide' – both are *breyt* in Lithuanian Yiddish]" (Zamenhof, 1910: 91).

There have been in modern times a number of reasoned explanations for the adoption of a standard based on Lithuanian pronunciation. One of the strongest is the near-perfect one-to-one correspondence of letter and sound (univalency) between Lithuanian Yiddish and all the widely used variants of modern Yiddish orthography (U. Weinreich, 1951). Once "that Lithuanian *ey*" (the one that corresponds to *oy* in the other dialects) is adjusted, the correspondence becomes – perfect. What could be a stronger point for a minority language in power nowhere, where an easy-to-learn "phonetic spelling" is vital?

Another argument brought to bear in favor of the standard is the historical and cultural prestige of Vilna. The city's status in Jewish lore as *Yerusholáyim d'Lite* (Jerusalem of Lithuania), deriving from its exquisite rabbinic scholarship over centuries, was widened this century to encompass modern secular Jewish culture (cf. M. Weinreich, 1973: III, 14). It has also been pointed out that it is much easier for a "southerner" ("Polish" or "Ukrainian" Yiddish speaking person) to master the northern Lithuanian dialect with its much smaller inventory of vowel phonemes, than vice versa (M. Weinreich, 1934: 281–282).

That is not to say that there has been no opposition. Major Yiddish scholars hailing from the southern dialect areas have stormed against what they regarded almost as a sort of Lithuanian mafia. Some championed introduction of a southern-based pronunciation norm (see e.g. Gininger, 1949, 1951). Some great Yiddish "southernist" scholars went so far as to devise radical new spelling reforms, introducing systems of diacritics

to reflect the much richer inventory of vowels and diphthongs in the southern dialects (which maintain the difference between long and short vowels). The best known "champions of the south" are master Yiddish dialectologist Noyakh Prilutski (1882–1941) and master Yiddish philologist Solomon A. Birnbaum (1891–1989). Prilutski felt certain that the Yiddish theatre standard (based on Southeastern Yiddish) would come to be the overall standard (Prilutski, 1927). Birnbaum's arguments spanned a wide gamut, from majority rule to linguistic appropriateness (Birnbaum, 1926; 1938).

These minority views notwithstanding, the Lithuanian based standard became a near universal ideal (if not always the practice) in modern Yiddish cultural, educational, and political institutions, in short, in the world of modern Yiddish culture. And for all the opprobrium and invective which Soviet Yiddish scholars heaped upon their non-Soviet colleagues abroad, they too came up with the same formula for Standard Yiddish, calling it "the historically progressive literary dialect" (Tsvayg, 1929: 24–25).

Cultural history is all about the meaning that "the dry matter" comes to take on in the course of the history of civilization, not any inherent quality of that matter. Articulatory phoneticians know as well as dentists that the tongue in one particular position inside the mouth is no nicer to look at than in any other position.

It is absolutely true that in the modern period, the variety recognized as standard pronunciation coincides overwhelmingly with the phonology of Lithuanian Jewry (defined as above in the Jewish historic sense, and encompassing a territory much larger than modern Lithuania). It is also true that Lithuanian Jewry has for hundreds of years enjoyed a prestige deriving from its superior academic institutions and its litany of top scholars, above all the Gaon of Vilna (*der vilner goen*), whose pupils and followers went on to establish a network of top yeshivas (rabbinic academies) throughout Lithuania. It is furthermore true that Vilna between the wars became the symbolic capital of the Yiddishist intelligentsia (for a number of reasons, including the migration of a number of top scholars and writers in the city, its Yiddish teachers' seminary, and above all the YIVO, founded in 1925).

But it is logically and historically mendacious to extrapolate cause-and-effect from such a series of juxtapositions. Verily, these juxtapositions all postdate the psychological rise of the standard. That standard owes its

existence (like so many things in history) to – a series of interlocking historical coincidences.

And what is the primeval coincidence? Quite simply, the inherited historical spelling system which generally marks vowel quality only, not vowel quantity. And *that* is a direct consequence of its derivation from the Hebrew and Aramaic alphabet which the first Ashkenazim modified for Yiddish around a thousand years ago.

Now the vowel qualities of the Lithuanian dialect (except for "that *ey*") are almost always phonetically closer to the values in older Yiddish and the source languages. For example, Lithuanian Yiddish *u* in *zun* 'sun' and *ksübe* 'marriage contract' corresponds to *u* in the stock languages (cf. Middle High German *sunne*, Tiberian Hebrew *ketubba*. The letter *vov* (modern Hebrew *vav*) is psychologically tied to the u̱-vowel (and other back vowels, notably o̱), from the earliest days of Yiddish (and well before Yiddish in Hebrew and Aramaic). The Polish Yiddish renditions *zin* and *ksibe* are intuitively dialectal, non-standard, not only for the "Lithuanian" ear, but even within the community of scholars whose native dialect is southern. A "psychological standard" of v̱o̱v̱ = u̱, repeated throughout the vowel system (komets-alef = *o*, two yuds =*ey* or *ay* but not *ā*), leads right up to the door of the standard. Add to this the fact that "*that* Lithuanian *ey*" (which derives from historical *o* vowels), has absolutely no support in the historical writing system, and the entire outline of standard Yiddish phonology turns out to be centuries old.

The group psychology of the sound system is at stake here, not any kind of "logic." Logic, for example, might take note that the Polish Yiddish system preserves far more distinctions than its Lithuanian counterpart and is therefore more faithful to the classic state of affairs in structural terms. Polish Yiddish distinguishes *zin* 'sun' from *zin* 'son' (cf. Middle High German *sunne* vs. *suon*); the *i* in *ksibe* marriage contract' from the *i* in *ksívem'* third part of the Old Testament, Hagiographa' (cf. Tiberian Hebrew *ketubba* vs. *ketūvīm* That Polish Yiddish maintains ancient structural differentiations is fascinating for the philologist. But for popular pscychology (and sociology), the physical, vowel-quality steadfastness ("faithfulness") of the Lithuanian rendition was overriding.

But the story does not end there. The major sound changes that characterize the development of each Yiddish dialect equally characterize the pronunciation of the two sacred Jewish languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, which accompanied Yiddish throughout its thousand year history on the native territory of Ashkenaz, both western and eastern.

Thus for example, the first passage in the book of Esther (the *Megkle*), reads, in a form of Polish Yiddish:

> Vayehi bimay akhashvayroysh hi akhashvayroysh hamoylaykh
> mayhoydi vead kish sheyva veesrim imayu medinu.

In a Lithuanian dialect of Ashkenazic Hebrew:

> Vayehi bimey akhashveyreysh hu akhashveyreysh hameyleykh
> meyheydu vead kush sheva veesrim umyeo medino.
>
> ("In the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to
> Ethiopia over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces [...]")

In short: the interdialectal Yiddish correspondences double as interdialectal Ashkenazic correspondences. Nevertheless, there are instances in the history of Ashkenazic where speakers have consciously tried to "resist history" by striving to maintain an archaic feature in the sacred language which was surrendering to sound change in the vernacular (I have called this phenomenon "sacred language resistance to vernacular sound shift"; see Katz, 1993: 60; 1994: 222–233). This will come into play in the present context in uncovering the most subtle link of all, that between the religious prestige of the Gaon of Vilna and the secular prestige of the Lithuanian-based standard Yiddish pronunciation. But first, we must turn to some of the debates concerning the standard or proper form of *Ashkenazic*, the Hebrew and Aramaic used in prayer, study, and recitation.

For centuries, top rabbinic minds in Ashkenaz argued about the suitable pronunciation of Ashkenazic. Various of the sound changes characteristic of the southern Eastern European dialects ("Polish" and "Ukrainian") had long been underway within Western Yiddish. Solomon Birnbaum has demonstrated that the oldest of the shifts was *u>ü>i* (Birnbaum, 1934).

What did the rabbis think of this development in the pronunciation of sacred liturgical Hebrew and Aramaic (transferred, of course, from local forms of Yiddish)? It depends which rabbis. The great kabbalist Yekhiel-Mikhl Epshteyn (Yehiel-Michel Epstein, died 1706), in the commentary in his prayerbook, railed against the substitution of *i* for *u* in the Hebrew liturgy, citing cases where meanings are obscured or even reversed when the two vowels collapse (Epshteyn, 1697: 79a–b; see Katz, 1994: 236–238). Epshteyn was a German Jewish rabbi. The prayerbook codifier Shabbethai Sofer (Shabse Soyfer, 1565–1635) held the same view (see Reif, 1979: 94). Shabse Soyfer lived and worked in Przemysl (Yiddish Pshemishl), in the heartland of Mideastern Yiddish (the "Polish dialect"), and we have here

a classic example of a scholar from the "non-standard" area rebuking his "own tribe" for their "mispronunciation" rather than arguing for the standardization of the local variety.

Yekhiel-Mikhl Epshteyn and Shabse Soyfer were in fact arguing for the conservative phonology of liturgical Hebrew (which survived in the then-dialects of Yiddish which are the forerunners of modern Lithuanian Yiddish, having preserved historical *u* vowels). Historically speaking, the *u>i* shift started the pull-chain which then shifted *o>u, au>o* (Katz, 1983: 1029).

But the antecedents of the southern dialects had their defenders too. Chief among them were the world famous Maharal of Prague (legendary creator of the Golem). Maharal is a rabbinic acronym of Yehuda-Leyb (Judah Loew) ben Betzalel (c. 1525–1609). In defense of *u>ü* (the intermediate stage, on the way to *i*), he recruited "every argument in the book" – ranging from the notion that every possible vowel is no doubt represented in the Torah; to the sanctity of one's forefather's traditions and pronunciations; to the forms of the Hebrew vowel signs at the time of creation of the world and the relationship of those forms to the sounds being denoted – in favor of a pronunciation that reflects dialects of Yiddish which are much closer to Polish than Lithuanian Yiddish (Maharal 1599: 58b–59b; see Katz, 1994: 238–244).

A similar line was taken by the Maharal's contemporary, the great rabbinic codifier and kabbalist known as the Lvush (Mordechai ben Avrom Yofe or Jaffe, c. 1535–1612), who calls "nonsense" the normative rejection of such a widespread and popular pronunciation as *ü*. He ends his argument by citing from Proverbs 1:8: "And forsake not the teaching of thy mother" (Lvush, 1603: 49b; see Katz, 1994: 244–148).

By the nineteenth century, the old "sound debate" between the rabbinic giants of an earlier generation had already been reinterpreted in the context of the new cultural and ethnograpic configuration of East European Jewry: the *Litvaks* in the north, most of them followers of the Gaon of Vilna, and the Polish and Ukrainian Jews to the south, where the Hasidic movement of Israel Bal Shem Tov (c. 1700–1760) had gained the upper hand. In East European Jewish folklore, the *Litvak* is learned but somewhat austere, humorless and lacking in profound religious belief. The southerners are said to be more pious and devout, wealthier, and less educated. This north-south divide is the main one in the cultural composition of modern East European Jewry.

The best known manifestation of the "reinterpreted sound debate" is the discussion between the pioneering Hebrew and Yiddish editor Alek-

sander Tsederboym (Alexander Zederbaum, 1816–1893) and the Hebrew writer and thinker Peretz Smolenskin (c. 1840–1885). In an article published in his Odessa Hebrew weekly, *Hameylitz* (Tsederboym, 1866) he lashed out at the *Litvaks*, calling them boastful of their superior skills, which enable them to do battle with the Hasidim not only from the vantage point of the German inspired Haskalah, but crucially, within the Torah world itself. The *Litvaks*, he claims, are poorer and often settle elsewhere looking for a livelihood, but tend to stick together and look down upon the local population. Finally, Tsederboym concedes that the *Litvak's* Yiddish is generally more correct, being closer to German but he cites instances where the opposite is true. The measure of closeness to German as a sign of "correctness" is typical of pre-modern thinking on Yiddish, especially in circles of the *maskilim* (Enlightenment proponents).

The young Peretz Smolenskin replied in *Hameylitz* (Smolenskin, 1867; Tsederboym's rejoinder = Tsederboym, 1867). Smolenskin refutes Tsederboym's claims, asserting that the Litvaks show great respect to the Polish merchants who come to their parts (even when these merchants are very ignorant). He claims, moreover, that the antagonism stems from the Polish Jews who hate the *Litvak* for not accepting their Hasidic *rebbe* (dynastically determined charismatic leader of a hasidic sect). Turning to language, Smolenskin defends Lithuanian Yiddish for having only two genders (notwithstanding that this feature makes the dialect further from German). He moves on – crucially for our argument – from spoken Yiddish to the pronunciation of Hebrew, and asserts that except for rendition of the Hebrew vowel *khóylem* (holam) as *ey* rather than *oy*, the *Litvaks* pronounce Hebrew correctly. In other words, the formula for "correctness" in *Hebrew* which Smolenskin takes as a given in his debate with Tsederboym "just so happens" to be the exact formula for modern standard *Yiddish* pronunciation. No coincidence here!

We may safely conclude, therefore, that the formula for standard Yiddish pronunciation, which is very close to the Lithuanian dialect and very far from the other dialects, is a historical product of hundreds of years of graphemic, linguistic, cultural and social history. The perceptions of correctness, derived from universal notions of "classicality" (the original state of affairs, the ancient language(s), the writing system), fed from old Ashkenaz in the Germanic speaking lands right into the new cultural setting of East European Jewry. The modern formula, "Lithuanian vowels except for the *ey* corresponding to *oy* in the other dialects" is the result of

Ashkenazic history, and was quite simply abstracted and codified by the modern Yiddish secular masters. Their great achievement was to achieve adoption of the standard. They brought the standard pronunciation into modern Yiddish cultural life, including schools and cultural and political organizations around the world.

It is noteworthy, within the framework of the history of ideas, that opposition to the standard also constitutes a solid intellectual tradition, one of recognizing the empirically real language varieties of natural speech communities as inherently valid. Indeed this recognition is one of the cornerstones of modern linguistics per se. The Maharal of Prague and the Lvush must be counted among the forerunners, even if they did invoke kabbalistic arguments.

In addition to the various graphemic, historical and cultural circumstances noted, the prestige of Lithuania within European (and world) Jewry played a critical factor in the seamless conceptual transmission of the standard formula, from old to new Ashkenaz, and from Ashkenazic Hebrew to Yiddish. By the nineteenth century, the incalculable prestige of the Gaon of Vilna and the yeshivas that his followers established throughout Lithuania (the most famous was in Valozhin, now in Belarus), gave the "pronunciation of Lithuania" a radiance of authority (that it continues to enjoy in traditionalist Orthodox communities worldwide).

It is, moreover, vital to remember that virutally all the great leaders of modern East European Jewish secular culture grew up in the traditional religious environment. The transfer of many aspects of non-juridical, non-ideological culture from the old environment to the new was only natural, and in many cases even unconscious.

But there is one final mystery. If the secular Yiddish standard pronunciation does really derive from the religious Hebrew of older and newer Ashkenaz, why does "the famous Lithuanian *ey*" survive in Lithuanian Ashkenazic Hebrew itself? In other words, why is the vowel *khóylem* (*holam*), rendered *ey* and not *oy* in such Lithuanian Ashkenazic words as *teyro* 'Torah' and *eylom* 'world'? The corresponding Lithuanian Yiddish forms are *téyre and éylem* 'audience' (Standard Yiddish *tóyre* and *óylem*). Or, note the forms *akhashveyreysh* 'Ahaseurus', *hameyleykh* 'who reigned', *meyheydu* 'from India' in the opening passage from Esther, cited above, which correspond with modern Standard Ashkenazic *akhashveyroysh*, *hamoyleykh*, *meyhoydu*.

Our fieldwork interviews with elderly Jews in towns and villages in Lithuania and (especially) Belarus, conducted from 1990 onward, reveal a

pattern of differentiation which may help explain matters. It is important to remember that the misnagdic-hasidic divide existed within Lithuanian Jewry as well as between the predominantly misnagdic northerners vs. the predominantly Hasidic southerners. Only the Hasidim on Lithuanian territory (again, defined here as the territory where Jews spoke Lithuanian Yiddish, including Belarus, Latvia and more), were very much more like the misnagdic *Litvaks*, speaking their dialect, and being more Talmudically oriented than their southern counterparts. The best known and most populous northern hasidic dynasty is Lubavitch (or Chabad), founded by Shneyer-Zalmen of Liady (1745–1813); others included Amdur, Karlin, Stolin and Lakhovitsh (see Rabinowitsch, 1970).

We routinely ask informants to read certain classical Hebrew texts in their native dialect and to recall from memory any texts, songs or passages in Hebrew or Aramaic.

It turns out that many *Litvaks* have dual realizations: *ey* in their Yiddish, *oy* in their Ashkenazic Hebrew, frequently in the cognates of one and the same word (e.g. some Lithuanian Ashkenazic *toyro* vs. Yiddish *téyre*). This duality of realization had been noticed by Altbauer (1968).

In the overwhelming majority of cases encountered to date, there is a systematic difference here between the Lithuanian Misnagdim (the "Anti-Hasidim") and the Lithuanian Hasidim (as rule of thumb, the further east into Belorussia, the larger the percentage of Hasidim, especially Chabad Hasidim, in any given town).

The Lithuanian Hasidim, as fate would have it, use a "deeper" form of Lithuanian Ashkenazic than the "classic" Lithuanian Jews, the Misnagdim: they consistently use *ey* for khóylem (cognate to the *ey* forms in Lithuanian Yiddish that correspond with *oy's* in the southern dialects), hence Ashkenazic *teyro*, Yiddish *téyre*, both with "the famous Lithuanian *ey*."

The Lithuanian Misnagdim, on the other hand, are the ones with the duality of realization: *ey* in their vernacular, *oy* in renditions of their Ashkenazic Hebrew and Aramaic (*téyre* in their spoken Yiddish, *tóyro* in their Ashkenazic).

The Misnagdim are of course the "actual tribe" founded, so to speak, by the Gaon of Vilna, who led the protest against Hasidism, and even signed edicts of excommunication against the Hasidim. The word *misnaged* means 'opponent' or 'protestant'.

The exact formula for modern (secular) standard *Yiddish*, is to be found in the (religious) Ashkenazic *Hebrew* not of all Jews who speak Lithuanian Yiddish, but of the misnagdim, the followers of the Gaon of Vilna.

And so it came to pass, that the religious prestige of the Gaon and his culture were intimately linked with the de facto codification of standard (*religious*) Ashkenazic, whose formula was transferred – imperceptibly, as if by magic – to modern (*secular*) literary Yiddish.

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