PREFACE

ON THE FIRST WINTER SYMPOSIUM

Yiddish linguistics is a small field focusing upon a minority language. Nevertheless, as a subject of human enquiry the discipline has a proud and intellectually complex history spanning nearly five centuries. Fascination with a language stretching at its geolinguistic peak over a huge portion of Europe, one that comprises the familiar Germanic with the exotic Semitic, is first documented in the works of early sixteenth century Christian scholars of Hebrew and Aramaic in Germany. By the early seventeenth century, Johann Buxtorf the Elder (1609: 639–669) produced a highly sophisticated survey of the language, that was surpassed only in the eighteenth by Chrysander's (1750a, 1750b) studies and Friedrich's (1784) lexicographical and dialectological compendium. Alongside this academic interest, inspired at the outset by the spirit of European Humanism, a host of extraneously motivated works on the language were published, among others, by missionaries, anti-Semites and writers of business people's manuals (see Katz 1986).

The rise of the 'Science of Judaism' movement amongst German-Jewish scholars in the early nineteenth century led its leaders to research Yiddish linguistics tangentially (Zunz 1832: 428–442) but their socially conditioned biases against the language precluded followups. In the arena of general linguistics, the ascent of the comparative method encouraged the incorporation of Yiddish into the orbit of both Germanic linguistics (Saineanu 1889 and Landau 1896) and Hebrew philology (Lebensohn 1874) by the late nineteenth century. In the twentieth, Yiddish linguistics came into its own by redefinition as a research discipline in and of itself, rather than a satellite of another, by its modern founder, Ber Borokhov (1913a; 1913b). His works posthumously inspired the golden era of Yiddish linguistics in interwar Eastern Europe. Its crowning achievement was the establishment of the Yivo Institute in Vilna in 1925 (See Shtif 1925 and Weinreich 1925).

The annihilation of most of Yiddish speaking European Jewry and its scholars by the Nazis and their collaborators, and the resulting irrecoverable loss of a vast quantity of unpublished work, are tragedies of immense proportions. Nevertheless, Yiddish linguistics as a university field of professional research was able to reemerge and to blossom anew, in good measure due to the lifework of Max and Uriel Weinreich, who both escaped the Nazis thanks to the coinciding of the Fifth International Congress of Linguists in Brussels, 28 August–2 September 1939, with the German invasion of Poland. Max Weinreich, a delegate from Vilna, read a paper on the origins of the Yiddish language at that Congress (Weinreich 1939), to which he had brought his teenage son Uriel. Max Weinreich at City College, and Uriel Weinreich at Columbia University, both in New York, succeeded in bringing Yiddish linguistics into the postwar mainstream of Western academia. Their broadly conceived approach incorporates research in linguistic theory benefitting from the fertile testing ground provided by Yiddish as well as study of the history and structure of Yiddish and its interaction with its Germanic, Semitic and Slavonic cognates. The emergence of Oxford as a centre of Yiddish Studies, with an emphasis upon linguistics, would not have been conceivable were it not for the Weinreichs' legacy.

Two factors are particularly conspicuous in the development of Yiddish Studies at Oxford. First is the Bodleian Library's vast Yiddish collection, deriving chiefly from its acquisition in 1829 of the Oppenheimer Collection which has long attracted Yiddish researchers to Oxford (see Judd 1983: 12–13). Second, and in a sense the key catalyzing force, is the work of the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, an associate institute of the University, founded in 1972 by Dr David Patterson to provide for the expansion and enhancement of Jewish Studies at Oxford University. From the very outset, Yiddish Studies were incorporated into the Centre's agenda. The early and consistent assistance of Mr Ron May, formerly Senior Assistant Librarian of the Department of Oriental Books in the Bodleian Library, Professor Chone Shmeruk and Professor Chava Turniansky, both of the Yiddish Department of Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and of Professor Marvin Herzog of the Linguistics Department at Columbia University, New York, is gratefully acknowledged.

In a closely coordinated array of activities collectively subsumed by its *Oxford Programme in Yiddish,* the Centre organizes courses, conferences and publications in the field of Yiddish language and literature, while providing doctoral supervision for the University's graduate research students who have come to Oxford from America, Israel, Great Britain and Europe to work on theses in the field. At the Centre's initiative, degree options in Yiddish Literature have been introduced into the BA in the University's Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages and the MPhil and MSt in Modern Jewish Studies in its Faculty of Oriental Studies. Two international conferences were organized jointly with Hebrew University and Columbia University in 1979 and 1983. Since 1982, the Centre has offered the *Oxford Summer Programme in Yiddish Language and Literature,* an intensive one month summer course at which some three hundred students from twenty-two countries have studied Yiddish language, literature and linguistics in a rigorous academic framework. While many individuals and institutions have helped to facilitate these and other advances, the overriding factor in their successful establishment has been the dedicated support and wise counsel of Dr Patterson, the University's Cowley Lecturer in Postbiblical Hebrew, and Professor S. S. Prawer, its Taylor Professor of German Language and Literature.

In the years since Uriel Weinreich's untimely death in 1967, the wider intellectual interest in Yiddish linguistics which he did so much to foster has continued to grow. Research is pursued by scholars in the fields of General Linguistics, German, Hebrew and Aramaic, and Slavonic, as well as those in the adjacent disciplines of folklore, history and comparative literature. The number of specialists in Yiddish linguistics per se has multiplied severalfold in the course of the last decade.

The need for both an annual meeting and the swift publication of its work is felt more acutely with each passing year. By establishing the yearly *Oxford Winter Symposium in Yiddish Language and Literature,* the Centre hopes to inspire new research by providing an annual forum of international scope that is sharply focused upon a single coherent issue, while facilitating the publication of its papers on a regular basis in the *Winter Studies in Yiddish* series, of which this is the inaugural volume.

The first Winter Symposium was opened on Sunday evening, 15 December 1985 by Dr Patterson, who read a telegram of greetings from the dean of Yiddish linguists, Professor Solomon A. Birnbaum, just over a week before Professor Birnbaum's ninety-fourth birthday. A welcoming speech was delivered by Dr Geza Vermes, Reader in Jewish Studies at the University of Oxford and Professorial Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford.

The organizers are proud that the volume begins with the two papers sent by Professor Birnbaum to the Winter Symposium. Both deal with crucially important methodological strategies that have been sadly neglected. The first outlines the paleographic method which he pioneered for dating Old Yiddish manuscripts. The second sketches the strategies for discovering etymologies, or more precisely, for avoiding self delusion via false etymology. By debunking all of the heretofore proposed etymologies for the target item—thought to be one of the oldest in the language—without proposing a new one, Professor Birnbaum delivers the powerful and timely message that etymological searches must be conceived in a spirit of professional restraint and within the structural context of amply attested phonological and morphological change in analogous noncontroversial items. The systematic and cautious extrapolation from the known to the unknown underlies both of Professor Birnbaum's papers.

The organizers are equally proud that two young scholars, Christopher Hutton and Dov-Ber Kerler, both doctoral candidates in the University of Oxford, make their academic débuts in this volume. Mr Hutton's paper studies the double and triple negative in older Yiddish texts, drawing inferences on the reconstruction of the oldest stages of the language. Mr Kerler succeeds in abstracting theories on the origins of Yiddish from the work of interwar Soviet Yiddish linguists, whose conspicuous concerns were oriented toward normativist issues.

It is known from the history of ideas that new bursts of intellectual energy in a field of human enquiry are from time to time characterized by a number of independently generated analogous results. The first Winter Symposium will perhaps best be remembered in the history of Yiddish linguistics for relocating the presumed origins of Yiddish to the Danube Basin while rejecting the traditionally accepted Rhineland. This stampede was presaged as long ago as the 1920s by the lonely voice of Matisyohu Mieses (1924: 269–318). In recent years it was launched by Robert King's (1979: 7) question, "Where is Loter?" By the first Winter Symposium the notion of a rather more easterly origin of the language is supported in varying degrees and via diverse research strategies in the papers of Faber, Jofen, Katz, King and Wexler. At the same time, the Rhineland theory itself yields new modification in Fuks's paper.

To ensure rapid publication, a deadline requiring Winter Symposium participants to submit final versions of their papers within three weeks of the Symposium was strictly enforced. It is regretted, but not unexpected, that not all participants were able to meet this requirement and it is hoped that papers not included will appear elsewhere in due course. The reader is invited to peruse the schedule of papers actually read before the Winter Symposium. It appears on p. 143.

The scholars whose work appears on these pages come to Yiddish linguistics with varying academic backgrounds and styles. Apart from requiring adherence to the bibliographic format adopted, editing has been kept to a minimum. One important exception concerns the nomenclature of Yiddish dialectology. The confusing term "Central Yiddish", used ambiguously both for the dialect whose heartland is Congress Poland (Prilutski 1920: 79) and for the parts of Hungary and Czechoslovakia intermediate between Western and Eastern Yiddish (Birnbaum 1979: 95) is deleted throughout. This dialect, popularly known as "Polish" is consistently referred to as *Mideastern Yiddish,* contrasting with the two other principal varieties of Eastern Yiddish—*Southeastern Yiddish* (popularly "Ukrainian") and *Northeastern Yiddish* (popularly "Lithuanian") which are nonambiguous and are retained untouched (see Katz 1983: 1020–1021).

Where linguistic accuracy in the narrow sense is not at stake, Yiddish names, concepts and bibliographic citations are transcribed, as is traditional in the field, according to the system of the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, with some modification. The system is based upon approximations of English orthographic values for phonemic units of Standard Yiddish, which is closest to Northeastern Yiddish in its phonemic inventory. Its salient features are [c]→*ts*, [č]→*tsh*, [j]→*y*, [ĵ]→*dzsh*, [š]→*sh*, [x]→*kh*, [ž]→*zh*, [ɛ]/[ə]/[ɪ]→*e*, [ɔ]→*o*. An exception is made in the case of Professor Birnbaum's paper, where his own transcriptions are retained at his request.

While fully adequate for the transcription of modern (=Eastern) Yiddish names and bibliographic references, where a closer phonetic transcription of one or another of the dialects would serve only to complicate matters unnecessarily, the Yivo system was not designed to cope with the rather different phonemic system of older forms of Western Yiddish. The present volume introduces a modified version adapted to Western Yiddish works written and published on Western Yiddish speech territory. Its key features are as follows. Vowels 24 (Mideastern [aj] ‖ Southeastern and Northeastern [ej]), and 44 (Mideastern and Southeastern [ɔj] ‖ Northeastern [ej]), merged as unitary [ā] in the West, are transcribed *aa*. Vowels 42 (Mideastern and Southeastern[ɔj] ‖ Northeastern [ej]), and 54 (Mideastern [ɔu]/[ō]/[ɔ̄] ‖ Southeastern [ɔu]/[u] ‖ Northeastern [ɔj]/[uj]), generally merged as unitary [ɔu] in the West, are transcribed *ou*.

The Winter Symposium's exceptional organization is principally due to the talents of Ms Jean Nightingale, the Oxford Centre's Administrative Secretary, who serves as Administrative Director of the Oxford Programme in Yiddish. Warm thanks are also due to Christopher Hutton and Dov-Ber Kerler who spared neither time nor energy to ensure the success of the project from the day it was conceived. John and Elsie Roberts, steward and housekeeper of Yarnton Manor, the Oxford Centre's early seventeenth century estate, arranged for a hearty welcoming supper. The hospitality of St Cross College in organizing a wine party at the Winter Symposium's conclusion is thankfully acknowledged.

The appearance of the volume is due to both the vision and the efficiency of Pergamon Press. The organizers are particularly grateful to Dr Ivan F. Klimeš, Associate Publisher and Director of Pergamon Press, and to Ms Sammye Haigh, Managing Editor for Social Sciences and Ms Jane Buekett, Journals Production Controller, for their invaluable advice and assistance at each stage of the project. Ms Marion Aptroot (Wolfson College, Oxford), Ms Devra Asher (St Cross College, Oxford) and Mr David Schneider (Exeter College, Oxford), kindly gave of their time to assist in proofing. Sincere thanks are due to Roy Harris, Professor of General Linguistics in the University of Oxford, to Mr Robert Maxwell, publisher of Pergamon Press, and to Ms Elizabeth Maxwell, for making this book possible.

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