PREFACE

ON THE SECOND WINTER SYMPOSIUM

In the half century preceding the Second World War, a number of talented scholars researched Yiddish dialectology in three directions. First, there were proposals for classification of major dialect areas (e.g. Saineau, 1889, pp. 14–16; Landau, 1896, p. 47; 1901, p. 34; Ayznshtat, 1908, p. 95; Landau and Wachstein, 1911, p. xli; Borokhov, 1913; Birnbaum, 1918, p. 16; Prilutski, 1920, p. 79; Mises, 1924, p. 1; M. Weinreich, 1940, pp. 69–71). Second, there were analyses of the dialects represented in selected older texts, including Glikl of Hamel’s memoirs (Landau, 1901), Henele Kirchhain’s Simkhes hanefesh (Fleiss, 1912) and the Hamburg manuscript of a rhymed Yiddish version of the book of Esther (Korman, 1930). Finally, there were descriptive studies of the spoken varieties of select areas, among them Eastern Galicia (Viler, 1924; 1926), Kurland (M. Weinreich, 1923, pp. 193–240; Kalmanovitch, 1926), and Lodz (Gutman, 1926). In Soviet Russia, Veynger’s researches (summarized in Veynger, 1929), led, after his death, to the publication of a Yiddish language atlas limited to the political boundaries of the Soviet Union (Vilenkin, 1931).

In spite of this and much more, Yiddish dialectology was by and large a one-man show. That man was Noyakh Prilutski (Prylucki), who was born on 1 October 1882. Prilutski compiled huge collections of high-precision dialectological and folkloristic data which he published in a series of impressive volumes (e.g. Prilutski, 1912, 1914, 1917a, 1917b, 1920, 1921, 1924, 1933, 1937, 1940). The mapping of his data remains a major goal of Yiddish dialectology. When it is accomplished, the resulting atlas will provide an astoundingly detailed picture of prewar Yiddish.

Prilutski’s vision of Yiddish dialectology combined his notion of the ‘territorial principle’ as paramount in language history, with more practical goals that were closely intertwined with the cultural and literary renaissance of Yiddish culture in interwar Eastern Europe (Prilutski, 1930). Prilutski was somehow able to fit Yiddish dialectology in with his other rather time-consuming activities. These included running a private law practice, serving in the Warsaw City Council, editing the Warsaw Yiddish daily Moment, leading the folklist party and serving as its representative in the Polish Parliament. On a visit to the United States on behalf of the homeless in the Ukraine, he was received by President Warren G. Harding. After migrating to Vilna during World War II, Prilutski was murdered by the Nazis in August of 1941.

Prilutski is the twentieth century grandmaster of Yiddish dialectology. His ability upon first acquaintance to pinpoint the village whence a Yiddish speaker hailed is legendary. Isaac Bashevis Singer (1956, p. 197), in his Mayn tatev bezoen shtrub (My Father’s Court), recalls his father’s visit to Prilutski’s Warsaw law office to seek advice on how to counter a swindler who had forged a promissory note for 600 rubles. Prilutski asked the elder Singer, after hearing him utter two words, whether or not he was of the district of Lublin. He was. Prilutski further enquired as to whether or not he was a native of Tomashov. He was.
PREFACE

After the Second World War, Beatrice Silverman-Weinreich’s recordings and Jean Jofen’s unpublished 1953 Columbia University dissertation demonstrated that it was after all possible to obtain reliable data from emigré informants. The present volume contains revised excerpts from Jofen’s thesis. The task of masterminding a full-scale atlas of both Western and Eastern Yiddish was undertaken by the young Uriel Weinreich (U. Weinreich, 1960a; 1963a). Weinreich’s life project, the Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry took full advantage of structural dialectology, a worldwide approach to seeking and interviewing informants, and computer technology. His Atlas was in an advanced stage of preparation at the time of his untimely death, at the age of 40, in 1967. The project is now directed by his former pupil, Professor Marvin I. Herzog, at Columbia University in New York. Its publication is eagerly awaited by the Yiddish scholarly world. Likewise, publication of Uriel Weinreich’s Outlines of a Descriptive Yiddish Dialectology. Provisional Structural and Lexical Index to the Yiddish Language and Culture Atlas (U. Weinreich, 1960b), a ‘guidebook to the Atlas’, is awaited with impatience.

In a series of highly original and influential papers, Uriel Weinreich brought Yiddish dialectology into the forefront of general linguistics. Yiddish was his laboratory for advances in the theory of structural dialectology (U. Weinreich, 1954), multilingual dialectology (U. Weinreich, 1952, 1958a), historical and comparative dialectology (U. Weinreich, 1958b, 1963b, 1964), and the theory of language change (Weinreich, Labov and Herzog, 1968). His work inspired his students to praiseworthy achievements (e.g. Herzog, 1965; Zuckerman, 1969).

It is evident from the contents of this volume that research in the late 1980s is focusing upon Western Yiddish and the application of Yiddish dialectology to the study of older Yiddish and non-Yiddish monuments (cf. the papers of Aptroot, Hutton, Katz, Kay, Kerler and Rosenfeld). The notion ‘literary dialect’ is examined by Kay in older Yiddish women’s poetry, and by Schneider in modern Yiddish drama. King’s paper carries forward some of the most intriguing structural questions posed by Uriel Weinreich in the early 1960s. Hiley reports on his startling discovery of an unknown vowel in Mideastern (‘Polish’) Yiddish, which he calls the /ej/ phoneme, which has hitherto been confused with Mideastern Yiddish /e/2. If his findings are instrumentally confirmed, ‘Hiley’s vowel’ may become known as vowel 14, thereby filling the hole in the series 04 (historical diphthongs) in Max Weinreich’s numbering system (cf. M. Weinreich, 1960; Herzog, 1965, p. 228; Katz, 1983, pp. 1021–1024).

Also evident from the second Winter Symposium is the gratifying growth of Oxford as a centre for research in Yiddish Studies. Six Symposium papers were read by graduate research students in Oxford University’s Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages and Literature. They are Marion Aptroot (Wolfson College), Dafna Clifford (St Cross College), Christopher Hutton (Wolfson College), Devra Kay (St Cross College), Dov-Ber Kerler (Lincoln College) and David Schneider (Exeter College). Chris Hutton has since taken up an assistant professorship in Yiddish at the University of Texas at Austin. Johannes Brosi, of Winterthur, Switzerland, a participant at the Symposium, has since commenced doctoral research in Yiddish dialectology at Hertford College, Oxford.

It is a pleasure to thank the people who assisted in the organization of the Second Winter Symposium and the production of this volume, second in the Winter Studies in Yiddish series. The talents of Jean Nightingale, Administrative Director of the Oxford Programme in Yiddish at the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, ensured a successful
event. Sammye Haigh, Managing Editor for Social Sciences at Pergamon Press, and Jane Buekett, Supervisor in Pergamon’s Production Department, spared no effort to ensure swift publication. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr David Patterson, President of the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, and to Dov-Ber Kerler, the Centre’s junior research fellow in Yiddish Studies. Their consistent support, generous assistance and wise counsel were invaluable.

The heroes and heroines of conferences are not always counted from among the readers of papers. One of the beloved personalities at the second Winter Symposium was its official photographer, Sharon (Chavele) Chazan, a brilliant art photographer whose work on Jews in London’s East End won her wide acclaim. Her Winter Symposium photos of Robert D. King elucidating the details of an intricate dialectological map, and of Jean Lowenstein and Alex Derczansky debating in French between sessions, appeared in a number of periodical publications in Britain, the United States and Israel.

Sharon Chazan was tragically killed in October 1987, at the age of twenty-four. This volume is dedicated to her memory.

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David Katz
Oxford, December 1987
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