Yiddish

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Yiddish is first attested in glosses to Hebrew manuscripts dating from the twelfth century. The first printed work in Yiddish is dated 1534. Like all Jewish languages, modern Yiddish uses the square Hebrew script. Yiddish has never had the official status of being a language of state (the so-called "Jewish Autonomous Oblast'" in Soviet Birobidzhan can hardly be viewed as an exception). Consequently there has never been a generally accepted central authority that could legislate a normative orthographic system; this has resulted in wide variation. All the orthographic systems are, however, basically alphabetic and can be viewed as either historically based or, preferably, interdialectal. (There is also no single normative orthoepy; native speakers generally speak in one of the three major dialects of the language.) Variation in the systems of orthography is shown in FIGURE 67.

These variations are largely correlated with different religious and political groups, with *phonemic* spelling of Hebrew and Aramaic words being typical of Soviet Yiddish as well as of non-Soviet Yiddish in the usage of radical left-wing organizations. *Pseudo-etymological* spelling is today found in some ultra-Orthodox Yiddish usage. The overwhelming majority of Yiddish publications today combine the traditional spelling of Hebrew and Aramaic words with the interdialectal morphophonemic spelling; these we call *standard* systems.

Standard orthographies

The overwhelming majority of modern Yiddish publications combine the traditional spelling of most Hebrew and Aramaic words with the interdialectal morphophonemic spelling of words of non-Semitic origin. There are many sub-varieties of this orthography. Perhaps the most widely used in literary works today is the so-called YIVO orthography proclaimed by the ייִדישער וויסנשאַפֿטלעכער אינסטיטוט (ייִוואָ) *Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut (YIVO)* 'Yiddish Scientific Institute' and the צענטראַלע ייִדישע

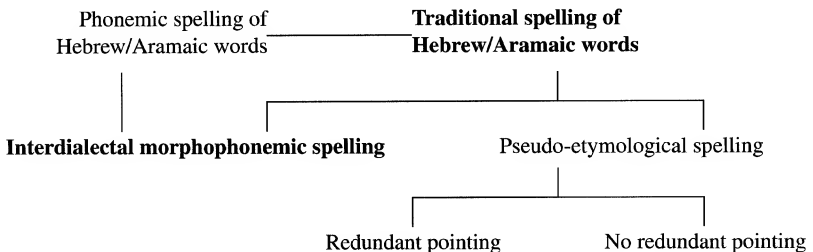|		
Phonemic spelling of Hebrew/Aramaic words		**Traditional spelling of** **Hebrew/Aramaic words**
	Interdialectal morphophonemic spelling	Pseudo-etymological spelling
	Redundant pointing	No redundant pointing

FIGURE 67. Yiddish orthographic systems (most common components of standard systems in **bold**).

TABLE 61.4: *The Yiddish Alphabet*

Letter[a]	Name	Value[b]	YIVO[c]	Other	Notes[d]
א	(shtumer) alef	–	– (ʾ)		silent; occurs initially before *i, u, ey, ay, oy*
אַ	pasekh alef	[a]	a	אַ	*
אָ	komets alef	[ɔ]	o	אָ	*
ב	beys	[b]	b	בּ	
בֿ	veys	[v]	v (ḇ)	ב	only in Semitic words; never word-initial
ג	giml	[g]	g		
ד	daled	[d]	d		
ה	hey	[h]	h		
ו	vov	[ʊ]	u (w)		
וּ	melupm vov	[ʊ]	u	וּ	*; occurs after וו *v*; occurs before י *y*
וו	tsvey vovn	[v]	v		*
וי	vov-yud	[ɔj]	oy		*
ז	zayen	[z]	z		
זש	zayen-shin	[ʒ]	zh		*
ח	khes	[x]	kh (ḥ)		only in Semitic words
ט	tes	[t]	t (ṭ)		
טש	tes-shin	[t͡ʃ]	tsh		*
י	yud	[j]	y		before or after vowel
		[ɪ]	i		between consonants
		[–ʲ]	y		after *t, d, s, z, l, n* and before a vowel indicates the palatals in words of Slavic origin
יִ	khirik yud	[ɪ]	i	יִ	*; occurs after initial י *y*; occurs after vowels
יי	tsvey yudn	[ɛj]	ey		*
ײַ	pasekh tsvey yudn	[aj]	ay	ײַ	*
כּ	kof	[k]	k	כ	only in Semitic words
כ, ך	khof, lange khof	[x]	kh (ḵ)		
ל	lamed	[ɫ, l, ʎ]	l		
מ, ם	mem, shlos mem	[m]	m		
נ, ן	nun, lange nun	[n]	n		
ס	samekh	[s]	s		
ע	ayin	[ɛ]	e (ʿ)		unstressed = [ĕ] or [ɪ], depending on dialect
פּ	pey	[p]	p		
פֿ, ף	fey, lange fey	[f]	f (p̄)	פ	
צ, ץ	tsadek, lange tsadek	[ts]	ts (ṣ)		
ק	kuf	[k]	k (q)		
ר	reysh	[ʀ]	r		
ש	shin	[ʃ]	sh (š)		
שׂ	sin	[s]	s (ś)	שׂ	only in Semitic words
תּ	tof	[t]	t	ת	only in Semitic words
ת	sof	[s]	s (ṯ)		only in Semitic words; never word-initial

a. A letter after a comma is the final form.
b. The values given do not necessarily apply to words of Semitic origin, which follow a distinct set of rules.
c. YIVO transliteration; the Hebrew transliteration of the letter is shown in parentheses.
d. An asterisk indicates that the letter/digraph is not treated by YIVO as a separate item for alphabetization.

שול־אָרגאַניזאַציע (צישאָ) Tsentrale yidishe shul-organizatsye (TsIShO) 'Central Yiddish School Organization' in Poland on September 1, 1936, and first published in 1937 in Vilno under the title *Takones fun yidishn oysleyg* 'Rules of Yiddish orthography'. In what follows, the YIVO system is described along with the major deviations from it in the more commonly used standard systems. TABLE 61.4 gives the traditional order of the Yiddish alphabet.

Variant orthographies

Most words of Semitic origin (Hebrew and Aramaic) are spelled in the traditional way in most Yiddish orthographies, e.g., אמת *ʾmt* ['ɛmɛs] 'truth', מלך *mlk* ['mɛjlɛx] 'king', סך-הכל *sk-hkl* [s(ɛ)'xakl] 'total'. However, Soviet Yiddish authors and many pro-Soviet radical organizations spelled such words according to the phonemic principle: עמעס, מיילעך or מיילעך, סאבאקל (the Hebrew system may have represented for them "obsolete" religion; cf. Hary 1990: 79, 1992: 112–13 on orthographic manifestation of competing political, religious, or cultural preference). As a consequence, the letters that occur only in words of Semitic origin (בּ *b*, ח *ḥ*, כ *k*, שׂ *ś*, תּ *t*, ת *t̲*) were not found there. In earlier Soviet Yiddish, the final letters ך *kh*, ם *m*, ן *n*, ף *f*, ץ *ts* were replaced by the non-final letters: כ, מ, נ, פ, צ. In 1961 the final letters were reintroduced into most Soviet Yiddish (with the main exception of publications from Birobidzhan).

Yiddish orthography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries showed a tendency to reproduce as literally as possible German orthography. We shall call such spelling *pseudo-etymological* (TABLE 61.5). In the same period certain texts contained, in addition to the regular vowel letters of Yiddish (אַ *a*, אָ *o*, ו *u*, י *i*, ע *e*; יי *ey*, יַי *ay*, וי *oy*), the Hebrew vowel points below the consonant: in what follows, (a) is a text with redundant vowel pointing and (b) is the corresponding YIVO orthography (words in italics are from Hebrew).

(a) דִי וָס הָאבֶּן אַ בִטָחוֹן אוֹף גָאט וֶעלֶן זֵיי זַיין אַזוֹי וִי דֶער בַּאַרג צִיוֹן

(b) די וואָס האָבן אַ בטחון אויף גאָט וועלן זיי זײַן אזוי וי דער באַרג ציון

Di vos hobn a *bitokhn* oyf Got veln zey zayn azoy vi der barg *Tsien.*

'They that have confidence in God, they will be just like (the) Mount Sinai.'

Such orthography was found in secular works in the nineteenth century; today, when found, it tends to be in works published by ultra-Orthodox groups.

TABLE 61.5: *Pseudo-etymological vs. Morphophonemic Spelling*

German	Pseudo-etymological		Pronunciation	Morphophonemic		Gloss
T(h)ür	טהור	thur	['tır]	טיר	tir	'door'
Jude	יוד	yud	['jıd]	ייד	yid	'Jew'
sehr	זעהר	zehr	['zɛjɛr]	זייער	zeyer	'very'
ver-	פֿער-	fer-	[far]	פֿאַר-	far-	(verbal prefix)
ab-	אַבּ-	ab-	[ɔp]	אָפּ-	op-	(verbal prefix)

TABLE 61.6: *Dialect Variation in Vowel Realization*

Letter	YIVO	Northeast	Central	South
אַ	[ɑ]	[ɑ]	[ɑ]	[ɑ]
אָ	[ɔ]	[ɔ]	[ʊ, ʊː/ɔ, ɔː]	[ʊ/ɔ]
י	[ɪ]	[ɪ]	[ɪ, ɪː]	[ɪ]
ו	[ʊ]	[ʊ]	[ɪ, ɪː/ʊ, ʊː]	[ɪ/ʊ]
ע	[ɛ]	[ɛ]	[ɛ/ɛj]	[ɛ/ɛj]
יי	[ɛj]	[ɛj]	[ɑː]	[ɑ]
ײַ	[ɑj]	[ɑj]	[ɑː(j)]	[ɛj]
וי	[ɔj]	[ɛj/ɔj]	[ɔj, ɔːj, ɔw]	[ɔj, ɔw, ʊ]

Vowel representation

As indicated above, YIVO orthography does not reflect the phonology of any of the three major dialects of Yiddish, though it closely approximates that of Northeast Yiddish. Dialect differences are found mainly in the vocalic system. TABLE 61.6 gives the most common values of the vowel letters in the YIVO norm and in the three major dialects.

Of the Yiddish vowel letters, only אַ *a*, אָ *o*, and ע *e* can occur word-initially, as in אַלט *alt* 'old', אָרעם *orem* 'poor', עסן *esn* 'eat'. The remaining vowel letters cannot occur at the very beginning of a word, but must, in this position, be preceded by the letter א, the so-called *shtume(r) alef* 'silent alef'. Note that the *shtumer alef* has no marking below the line; this differentiates it from the vowels אַ *a* and אָ *o*. In initial position the remaining vowels have the forms אי *i*, איי *ey*, אײַ *ay*, אוי *oy*, או *u*, as in איך *ikh* 'I', איין *eyn* 'one', אײַזן *ayzn* 'iron', אויג *oyg* 'eye', אונטער *unter* 'under'. As a rule, when a word beginning with one of these vowels is preceded by a prefix, the *shtumer alef* remains, e.g., אייביק ['ɛjbɪk] 'eternal', פֿאַראייביקן [farˈɛjbɪkŋ] 'immortalize'.

Consonant representation

The spelling of words of non-Semitic origin generally does not indicate such phonologically conditioned alternations as voice assimilation, assimilation of nasals, simplification of C_1C_1 clusters, etc.; e.g., איך ליב *ikh lib* ['ɪx 'lɪb] 'I love' in the north, ['ɪx 'lɪp] in the south, and דו ליבסט *du libst* ['dʊ 'lɪpst]; האָבן *hobn* ['hɔbm̩] 'to have', אָנפּאַקן *onpakn* ['ɔm'pakŋ] 'cram'; אָפּפּוצן *opputsn* ['ɔ'putsn̩] 'polish'.

Palatal *ty, dy, sy, zy*, and *ny* (occurring almost exclusively in words of Slavic origin) are marked by טי, די, סי, זי, ני before vowels; palatal *ly* before vowels is marked by לי in words of Slavic origin, but is generally unmarked in words of Western European origin. Syllable-final palatals are not marked. Examples: טיאָך *tyókh* 'throb', דיעגעכץ *dyégekhts* 'tar', גאָטיניו *gótinyu* 'God (dim.)', ליולקע *lyúl'ke* '(tobacco) pipe', לינאָליי *linol'éy* 'linoleum'.

The orthography does not indicate stress, which is distinctive.

TABLE 61.7: *Differences between YIVO and Other Orthographies*

	YIVO	Non–YIVO	Transliteration	Gloss
(a)	וווּ	וואוּ	vu	'where'
	ווּנדער	וואונדער	vunder	'wonder'
	געוווּסט	געוואוסט	gevust	'known'
(b)	נאַיִוו	נאַאיוו	naiv	'naive'
	רויִק	רואיק	ruik	'calm'
(c)	ייִד	איד	yid[a]	'Jew'
	ייִנגל	אינגל	yingl[a]	'boy'
(d)	שיין	שיין	sheyn	'beautiful'
	שײַן	שיין	shayn	'glow'
	וויין	וויין	veyn	'(I) cry'
	װײַן	וויין	vayn	'wine'
	ניין	ניין	neyn	'no'
	נײַן	ניין	nayn	'nine'
(e)	כּיבּוד	כיבוד	kibed	'tribute'
	תּרבּות	תרבות	tarbes	'politeness'
(f)	שׂמחה	שמחה	simkhe	'party'
	שעה	שעה	sho	'hour'
(g)	בבֿל	בבל	bovl	'Babylonia'
	פֿאָר	פאָר	for	'(I) travel'
	פּאָר	פּאָר	por	'pair'
(h)	געגנבֿעט	גע׳גנב׳עט	ge-*ganv*-et	'stolen'
(i)	משהס	משה׳ס	*Moyshe*-s	'Moses''
	זעלדעס	זעלדע׳ס	Zelde-s	'Zelda's'

a. In some dialects these words are pronounced [ɪd], [ɪŋɫ].

Special spellings

TABLE 61.7 exemplifies a number of spelling differences between YIVO and other systems. (a) Sequences of *v+u* are spelled with the letter ו for [ʊ] in YIVO spelling, while other orthographies generally have a *shtumer alef* before the ו. (b) After a vowel YIVO uses the letter י to indicate [ɪ], while most other systems again use a *shtumer alef* here. (c) The letter י is also used after initial י to mark the initial sequence [jɪ]; most other systems use the sequence אי.

Other differences between YIVO and other systems include: (d) lack of distinction between יי *ay* and יי *ey*; (e) in many publications, absence of the *dagesh* (dot) distinguishing כּ [k] from כ [x] and תּ [t] from ת [s]; frequently, lack (f) of the dot distinguishing שׂ [s] from שׁ [ʃ] in YIVO spelling, and (g) of the *rafe* (bar above a letter) that serves to distinguish בֿ [v] from בּ [b] and, in addition to the *dagesh*, to distinguish פֿ [f] from פּ [p]. (h) Non–YIVO systems tend to separate non-Semitic affixes from Semitic roots by means of apostrophes. Similarly, (i) the possessive *s* is often separated from the noun, as in English, by an apostrophe.

SAMPLE OF YIDDISH

The transliteration here deviates from the YIVO system in two respects: words of Semitic origin are transliterated according to Hebrew transliteration (italicized), with the YIVO transliteration in line 2; and the *shtumer alef* is indicated by a hyphen. (In the right-to-left transliterations, the equivalents that are digraphs are underlined merely for clarity.)

←נאָך דער חתונה פֿון גרשמען מיט נחמהען האָט זיך דאָס פּאַרפֿאָלק
klofrop sod <u>kh</u>iz toh ne*hmhn* tim nem*šrg* nuf *hnth* red <u>kh</u>on←

געלעבט שטיל און באַשיידן. צו דער ריכטיקער צייַט איז נחמה געלעגן
ngeleg *hmhn* zi- tya<u>ts</u> rekit<u>kh</u>ir red u<u>ts</u> .ndye<u>sh</u>ab nu- lit<u>sh</u> tbeleg

געוואָרן, געהאַט אַ ייִנגעלע און דער ברית איז פֿאַרגעקומען כדת משה
hšm *tdk* nemukegrof zi- *tyrb* red nu- elegniy a taheg ,nroveg

וישׂראל. די שטיל געבענטשטע ליבע האָט זיך אַרויסגעריסן פֿון דער
red nuf nsiregsyora <u>kh</u>iz toh ebil etshtnebeg lit<u>sh</u> id *.lʾršyw*

פֿרום־צניעתדיקער געצוימטקייט און האָט געאַנקערט אַן דער פֿרייד
dyerf red ni- treknaeg toh nu- tyektmyo<u>ts</u>eg rekid*t* *ʿyns*–murf

פֿון זייער בשותפֿותדיקן ייִנגעלע מענדעלע-- אַזוי האָבן אַ אים זיי אַ
a mi- yez nboh yoza —elednem elegniy nkid*twptwšb* reyez nuf

נאָמען געגעבן. די עלטערן פֿון ביידע צדדים, סייַ פֿון קאָצק
kstok nuf yas ,*myddṣ* edyeb nuf nretle id nbegeg nemon

און סייַ פֿון קעלעם, האָבן געהאַט פֿון זיי נחת.
nu- yas nuf <u>kh</u>elem, nboh taheg nuf yez *thn*.

1. Transliteration:	nokh	der	*htnh*	fun	*gršm*en	mit	*nhmh*en
2. Normalization:	nokh	der	khasene	fun	Gershemen	mit	Nekhomen
3. Transcription:	nɔɣ	dɛr	'xasɛnɛ	fʊŋ	gɛr'ʃɛmɛn	mɪt	nɛ'xɔmɛn
4. Gloss:	after	the	marriage of		Gershom.DAT	with	Nekhame.DAT

1.	hot zikh	dos	porfolk	gelebt	shtil -un	basheydn.	tsu	der
2.	hot zikh	dos	porfolk	gelebt	shtil un	basheydn.	tsu	der
3.	'hotsɛx	dɔs	pɔr'fɔlk	gɛ'lɛpt	ʃtɪɫ ʊn	ba'ʃɛjdn̩	tsu	dɛr
4.	has REFL	the	married.couple	lived	quiet and	modest	to	the

1.	rikhtiker	tsayt	-iz *nhmh*	gelegn gevorn,	gehat	a	yingele -un	der
2.	rikhtiker	tsayt	iz Nekhome	gelegn gevorn,	gehat	a	yingele un	der
3.	'rɪxtɪkɛr	'tsajt	ɪz nɛ'xɔmɛ	gɛ'lɛgn gɛ'vɔrn̩	gɛ'hat	ɑ	'jɪŋgɛlɛ ʊn	dɛr
4.	correct	time	is Nekhame	gave.birth	had	a	boy and	the

1. *bryṯ*   -iz   forgekumen *kdṯ*   *mšh   wyśr ʾl*
2. bris   iz   forgekumen kedas   Moyshe ve-Yisroel
3. 'brɪs   ɪs   'fɔrgeˈkumɛn kɛ-ˈdɑs   'mɔjʃɛ vɛ-jɪsˈrɔɛɫ
4. ritual.circumcision is occurred   according.to-law.of Moses and-Israel

1. di   shtil   gebentshte   libe hot zikh   aroysgerisn   fun der frum–
2. di   shtil   gebentshte   libe hot zikh   aroysgerisn   fun der frum–
3. dɪ   'ʃtɪɫ   geˈbɛntʃtɛ   'lɪbɛ 'hotsɛx   aˈrɔjzgeˈrɪsn̩ fun der 'frum-
4. the   quietly blessed   love has REFL   wrested   from the pious-

1. *ṣny ʿṯdiker*   getsoymtkeyt -un hot geankert -in   der freyd fun
2. tsniesdiker   getsoymtkeyt un   hot geankert in   der freyd fun
3. 'tsnɪɛsdɪkɛr   geˈtsɔjmtkɛjt ʊn (h)ot geˈaŋkert ɪn   dɛr 'frɛjt fʊn
4. virtuous.DAT   restraint   and has anchored in   the joy   from

1. zeyer *bšwṯp̄wṯdikn*   yingele mendele—   azoy hobn   zey -im a
2. zeyer beshutfesdikn   yingele mendele—   azoy hobn   zey im   a
3. 'zɛjɛr beˈʃutfɛsdɪkŋ   'jɪŋgɛlɛ 'mɛndɛlɛ aˈzɔj 'hɔbm̩   'zɛj ɪm   ɑ
4. their joint   boy   Mendele   so   they.have they him a

1. nomen   gegebn. di   eltern   fun beyde *ṣddym*,   say fun kotsk
2. nomen   gegebn. di   eltern   fun beyde tsdodim,   say fun kotsk
3. 'nɔmɛn geˈgɛbm̩ dɪ   'ɛɫter-n̩ fʊm 'bejdɛ 'tsdɔdɪm   'saj fʊŋ 'kɔtsk
4. name   given   the parent-s from both side-s   both from Kotsk

1. -un   say fun khelem,   hobn gehat fun   zey *nḥt*.
2. un   say fun khelem,   hobn gehat fun   zey nakhes.
3. ʊn   'saj fun 'xɛɫem   'hɔbm̩ geˈhat fʊn   'zɛj 'naxɛs
4. and   both from Khelem have had   from   they pleasure

'After the marriage of Gershom and Nekhome, the married couple lived quietly and modestly. At the proper time Nekhame gave birth, had a boy, and the ritual circumcision occurred according to the law of Moses and Israel. A quietly blessed love arose from their pious and virtuous restraint and became anchored in the joy of their common boy Mendele—so they had named him. Their parents on both sides, both from Kotsk and from Khelem (two Polish towns), had pleasure from them.'   *—Erlikh 1977: 49.*

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