The Languages of the Jews: Notes added in proof

Bernard Spolsky Updated March 11, 2014

When I first read “notes added in proof” at the head of footnotes in a scientific journal, I assumed that it referred to additional evidence, meaning further proof, but as I have learned more about the publishing process, I now realize that it means something that was added while the document was in the proof stage. These notes were written even later, when it was no longer possible to add text to the printed book, its pagination already set and tables of content and index already prepared, without causing a major delay in the publication date. I have therefore taken advantage of the publisher’s offer to provide this material on the book’s web site.

It consists of two kinds of resource: two explanations that I feel will make the text easier to understand, and new material that is defined in the APS Style manual as “information added by the author at the *proof* stage, containing scientific comments that are relevant to the paper but were discovered *after the paper was accepted for publication* (usually as a result of some new findings that took place in the interim).” In particular, it includes papers or books that were published or that I came across after the submission of the manuscript. Given the wide range of the topics covered in *The Languages of the Jews*, and the fact that there is continued scholarship in the fields it draws on, it is not surprising that there should be a quantity of such new findings, which call for some reconsideration and will necessarily lead to changes in any future edition.

For Chapter 1 – a summary statement

I start with a section that I would have liked to have added early on, ideally in Chapter 1, to summarize the book:

Some three thousand years ago, a group of people (the Bible calls them the Children of Israel) united to form a kingdom in a small part of the eastern Mediterranean, occupying a space that served as a land route between Europe, Asia and Africa. This dangerous location invited the regular conquest of the area by neighboring empires, so that after a few hundred years, one sector of the kingdom was exiled and disappeared (the Ten Lost Tribes whose story is claimed from time to time by people in Africa, Asia and America). Much of the population of the remaining kingdom of Judah was taken into captivity in Babylonia for a time, and a section of them returned, only to come under Persian and later Greek and Roman rule. Later, Rome having destroyed their central place of worship in Jerusalem, the Jewish people were expelled and began two thousand years of exile.

In the Diaspora, Jewish communities were regularly persecuted and often forced to leave, and many chose to seek new places to live. The Crusades made life even more difficult, and led to even wider scattering towards the east. Only with the Emancipation in Western Europe and the possibility of religious freedom in the Americas was there the promise of a more normal life. The new freedom, however, weakened the bonds of traditional Jewish life. The growth of secular nationalism and anti-Semitism brought new threats, encouraging Jews to emigrate to the west and to the New World. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a Jewish political movement starting in Eastern Europe sought to implement an age-old yearning for Zion, inspiring a return to what was then Ottoman Palestine and culminating in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. In the meantime, European Jewry had been wiped out by the Nazis and shortly after, Jews were expelled from Arab lands. The reestablishment of the State left major problems: there are still external threats, and continued internal conflicts.

That is the history, not my area of specialization, but necessary background to the sociolinguistic story I want to tell. Linguistically, the Hebrew language grew out of a cluster of Canaanite languages and dialects in the region. During the period of the independent kingdoms of Israel and Judah, it was the dominant language of a monolingual population. After the return of some Jews about 600 BCE from seventy years of Babylonian exile, under Persian rule, Hebrew started to share a linguistic repertoire with Aramaic; Aramaic became the vernacular of the Jews who remained in Babylonia. Hebrew continued in both Judea and Babylonia as the language of a major sacred literature, filling this role for most Jews until the present day. After the Greek conquest of Judea in the 330s BCE and under Roman rule starting in 63 BCE, Greek was added as a third component; it also became the normal vernacular language of Jews living in the Mediterranean Diaspora. Hebrew eventually ceased to function as a vernacular but after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, continued to play a central role in liturgy and literacy: all Jewish boys were expected to become literate in it. After the Jews were expelled from Judea by the Romans, their Diasporas spread throughout north Africa, Asia Minor and Europe. In each country, they acquired the local dominant language, but a strong religious educational system maintained literacy in Hebrew and continued to produce a rich religious literature in it.

When Diaspora Jews chose or were forced by local conditions into isolation, their internal communal spoken variety started to vary from the local language, producing a series of Jewish language varieties. The best-known of these were Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Greek, Judeo-Spanish, Yiddish, and Judeo-Aramaic, but there have been many others. These five also later developed written forms and produced successful Diaspora cultures and literatures.

After the Emancipation in Western Europe and in the Americas, many Jews assimilated, commonly shifting to the local dominant language and some even dropped Hebrew. During the late nineteenth-century, associated with the ideologically motivated return to Zion, a modified and modernized Hebrew was reestablished as a vernacular; it became the dominant language of the newly founded state in 1948 and was adopted by those who immigrated to it, European Jews who survived the Holocaust and a million Jews expelled from Arab lands. Currently, Jews (and others) in Israel speak Hebrew, and Jews in the Diaspora speak the local dominant languages, such as English, French, Spanish, Russian or Turkish; a handful of Jewish varieties continue as markers of identity, souvenirs of a rich but mostly lost Diaspora heritage.

The sociolinguistic history of Hebrew is unique. It continued as a language of literacy and as a sacred language for two thousand years after it was no longer used as a living vernacular, but in Israel it has again become the language used in all domains of normal daily life.

For Chapters 2 to 5, Social history of Classical Hebrew

Published at the end of 2013, a new book offers a sociolinguistic account of the development of the Hebrew language until the end of the Jewish Revolts.

Schniedewind (2013) traces the Hebrew language from its beginnings until the end of vernacular usage, which he dates about 200 CE. The break occurred, he emphasizes, not at the Babylonian Exile but several hundred years later, after the Bar Kokhba Revolt. After the destruction of the Hebrew-speaking villages, a few small Hebrew-speaking communities may have survived until the 4th century CE, but by then the continued existence of Hebrew depended on its use as a sacred and literary language by Jews speaking other varieties.

Schniedewind deals with written Hebrew, acknowledging the uncertainties of reconstructing the use and form of the spoken language. He calls the variety Classical Hebrew, which includes both Biblical Hebrew and the developed form of Rabbinic Hebrew, as used within the region variously called Judah, Yehud and Palestine; he notes that the language was only called Hebrew after the beginning of the Exile.

Basing his study on written evidence – Biblical passages with their assumed dates and archeological findings including inscriptions and ostraca - he summarizes the main features of the form of the language at each of a number of stages of development, being careful all the time to base his interpretations on what is known of the social situation and to validate his statements by established sociolinguistic principles.

The stages of Hebrew that he identifies are Archaic Biblical Hebrew (the earliest period from Late Bronze Age until the early Iron Age); what he calls Israelian Hebrew (the period of early linguistic nationalism, consisting of the northern dialects that were wiped out by the Assyrian invasions and that survived only as influences on the Judean variety that followed); Judean Hebrew, including the large corpus of Hebrew inscriptions from about 725 to 586 BC; the Babylonian exile, and the continuation of a scribal tradition of Standard Biblical Hebrew; the use of Aramaic as a literary language during the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman periods, marked by Hebrew and Aramaic bilingualism, with a probable break in the Hebrew scribal tradition; a new scribal tradition leading to the development of Late Biblical Hebrew (a variety influenced by Aramaic and borrowing from it freely); and the Hebrew of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, a time of competition between Aramaic and Hebrew, which included the democratization and revival of Hebrew literacy and which produced the Hebrew of Qumran. Qumran Hebrew, he believes constituted what Halliday called an *antilanguage,* containing idiosyncratic linguistic features (like Quaker English) to distinguish it from normative usage. As a result of the defeat of the Jewish revolts against the Romans, the Hebrew speech communities dating back a thousand years were destroyed or displaced and Hebrew ceased to be a used as an everyday vernacular language, but a new tradition of written Hebrew, the Rabbinic Hebrew of the Mishnah and Tannaitic texts (to be seen also in many inscriptions) emerged and became the basis of continuing Hebrew literacy that was maintained for two millennia by prayer and study.

Schniedewind's book exemplifies clearly the possibilities and difficulties of historical sociolinguistics, showing the challenge of interpreting written evidence and relating it to the spoken language.

For Chapter 3, the continued use of Hebrew

I next give a paragraph to clarify the complex problem of how long Hebrew continued to be used after the return from Babylonian Exile (this would come at the beginning of Chapter 3):

The fact that Aramaic was added to the languages of the Jews both in Babylonia and in Judea after the Exile is generally accepted, but what happened to Hebrew among those who remained in Judea and those who returned from Babylonia has become an issue of major dispute. In chapter 3, I set out the opposing views. One side (which now includes some Christian scholars) argues that Hebrew continued to be spoken and to develop normally in Judea alongside Aramaic after the return from 70 years in Babylon until at least the destruction of the Second

Temple, nearly 500 years later, or even (in some views) for another 200 years after that; it was in due course challenged by the use of Greek in Palestine and the Diaspora (see Chapter 4). A second school of thought interprets the existing evidence differently; they hold that the Babylonian Exile marked the end of vernacular use of Hebrew, although Hebrew continued to be used by limited groups (Rabbis especially) for the writing of sacred texts such as the Mishnah. In this view, the Hebrew that the Rabbis wrote was an artificial language, like the Latin used by Christian writers in the Middle Ages. Again, the evidence is sparse and depends on texts that were written many years after the time that they describe and that have been variously interpreted. The first group of scholars might be labeled the multilingual Hebraists, and they argue that Hebrew was spoken in Judea after the return as a vernacular alongside Aramaic and later alongside Greek, in a multilingual or triglossic pattern. The second group (and it is not irrelevant that some of them were raised in Anglo-Saxon or German monolingualism) included those who asked what language Jesus spoke, ignoring the probability of his plurilingualism.

For Chapter 4, The implementation of Hebrew education

Chapter 4 does not make enough of the development of Hebrew education after the destruction of the Second Temple.

A recent publication by two economists, Botticini and Eckstein (2012), mentioned in the book only in a footnote, presents a convincing argument for the significance of the implementation of the rabbinic call for the universal teaching of Hebrew to young boys. They set out to account for some established facts: first. while the Jewish population at the time of Jesus was estimated at five million, it had fallen to one million or so by the Islamic period six hundred years later, and second, whereas most Jews during the late Second Temple period were engaged in agriculture, the large majority were by the tenth century CE involved in skilled professions and commerce. Their explanation in brief is that until its destruction by the Romans, the Temple in Jerusalem served as a second pillar of Judaism alongside study of the Torah. After the destruction, only study remained as a unifying feature of Jewish existence. But for a farming population, to follow the rabbis' call for establishing schools for all boys at the age of six was difficult and expensive: teachers had to be paid, and the boys' farm labor was lost. As a result, only a minority of Jewish farmers chose to send their boys to school. The others drifted away from Jewish observance, choosing for instance to become Christians or later Muslims, two religions which at the time required literacy training only for clerics and religious functionaries. But those Jews who did maintain identity and make Hebrew literacy available to their sons produced a population capable of providing literacy-related professional and commercial skills when in the late middle ages cities and international commerce developed. True, what was taught was literacy in Hebrew intended to provide access to sacred texts, but it also permitted the writing of other languages in Hebrew script, as happened with Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Spanish, Yiddish and other Jewish varieties. This educational revolution had a major effect not just on Jewish demography but also on language maintenance, explaining why Hebrew was still alive for two millennia after it ceased to be a spoken vernacular.

There are two intriguing issues raised by this powerful hypothesis that I did not have time to explore, but that I would like to sketch here: gender differentiation, and school language maintenance.

Gender differentiation

At various periods, there is evidence of major differences in language use by Jewish men and women. In one of the calls in the Talmud for teaching Hebrew to boys, it is stated that any man who does not teach his six-year-old son Hebrew is denying him a place in the world to come. Presumably, this was said at a time when mothers were no longer talking to their children in Hebrew, but had switched to Aramaic (or perhaps Greek); educated men however had the Hebrew background to tackle the teaching task. (In practice, this was delegated to teachers in the schools that each community was required to establish and support). A similar lack of Hebrew in women shows up in the pattern in Eastern Europe where women were assumed to be able to read Yiddish but not Hebrew. There are many intriguing questions raised by this. One concerns the revitalization of Hebrew in 19th century

Ottoman Palestine villages, where the fathers can be assumed to have much the same knowledge of sacred Hebrew as the school teachers; but how did the mothers manage to understand their Hebrew speaking children when they came home? One explanation might be that the Hebrew the children learned remained close to Yiddish, and that as many as a fifth of the words they used had in fact been borrowed into Yiddish, and so would be known by women too.

Another aspect of the gender differentiation concerns the opposite situation. Among Hasidic Yiddish speakers, there are regular reports that women tend to shift to the local language (English in the US, Modern Hebrew in Israel) which they then speak to their young children; the boys start picking up Hasidic Yiddish when at the age of six or so they start to go to *heder* (religious primary school). To deal with this imbalance, some Hasidic groups have started to encourage the teaching of Yiddish in schools for girls. One would like to see further consideration of this issue of gender differentiation among Jewish communities at various times.

School language transmission

Those who are concerned about language maintenance and reversing language shift generally accept Joshua Fishman's statement about the critical importance of natural intergenerational language transmission, with babies learning the language from their parents (Fishman, 1991). In looking at the maintenance of Hebrew language proficiency it is obvious that this was not a factor between the second and twentieth century CE, but that the language was maintained by the educational system that the Jewish communities supported. Even today, Jewish religious schools in the diaspora are called "Hebrew schools", asserting the continued centrality of this language teaching function. There are of course other examples of school language transmission, such as the centrality of Latin in European education until the twentieth century, and the religious maintenance of Classical Arabic in the many countries where the language is not a vernacular. There is a suggestion here that language revival activists might be more satisfied than they are with settling for school based instruction, and in encouraging the postvernacular activities that were the start of the Māori language revival movement and that are to be noted with secular Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish groups.

More for Chapter 4, The underlying grammar of Jewish varieties

Most linguists and laypeople assume the existence of named languages like English or Hebrew, and studies of Jewish varieties assume the mixture of these independent language systems, so that Yiddish is seen as a mixture of German, Hebrew and some Slavic languages. But might there not be a better way to handle mixed varieties?

On page 55, I refer briefly to the grammatical model of Ray Jackendoff (2010, 2012), which he calls parallel architecture. This model suggests a quite different way of thinking about the kinds of language mixture that occur in modern multilingual urban settings and that also marked the Jewish communities described in *The Languages of the Jews*. The established way to talk about languages in conflict is to assume two (or more) grammars and lexicons, "interfering" with each other. This was the approach taken by Uriel Weinreich (1953) in his pioneering dissertation on languages in contact. More recent work has investigated the conditions for code-switching (also called code-mixing and studied by, among others, Carol Myers-Scotton (1993, 2002), who asks in particular how to determine which language is the base and which is being borrowed. But this approach starts with the idea of grammars for a named and labeled language, the traditional approach to linguistic description. Looking in particular at the language mixtures that occur in modern multilingual cities, linguists like Jan Blommaert (2005, 2013) have started to ask if this is the best model. Is there a grammatical theory that starts with the mixed variety and assumes it has a single grammar?

My best hunch is that this is what Jackendoff's parallel architecture could accomplish. In his theory, knowing and using a language variety means knowing and using the various items that make it up. Each item (which may be either a lexical item or a grammatical rule) has a number of components. The highest is the semantic value (the meaning), followed by the physical shape (phonology or orthography) and combining possibilities (morphology and syntax). But each item is also marked for sociolinguistic features, such as style (formal, informal, intimate) or audience. In this way, an item might be be marked as part of a named language and as appropriate when speaking to monolinguals. Or some Gricean rule of appropriateness could say when one can reasonably use the item ("Don't use a swear word when your mother is there." "Don't use a Yiddish word when you are speaking to a non-Jew."), or set the proportion of such use ("Use more words from the marked variety when you are claiming identity."). This kind of grammar accounts for gradual learning of items, and provides also a picture of gradual language shift as a speaker adjusts to a new linguistic environment. It fits very well the detail of newly religious Jews modifying their language that Sarah Benor has described for English and the kinds of mixed teen age speech observed in multilingual situations.

For Chapter 7, The gradual spread of Arabic

New research on the spread of Islam has started to appear, suggesting a somewhat different process than the one that I described.

In Chapter 7, I have largely followed Hugh Kennedy's (2007) explanation of the rapidity of the spread of Islam. I refer in footnotes in the chapter to some challenges to his approach. First, it has recently been shown that cultural and language changes were much less rapid than are sometimes assumed. With exceptions, conquest and early settlement were by small groups of Arab warriors, who established isolated towns and generally did not mix with the existing population. As a result, there was a long period during which the culture of the conquered areas drew on Jewish and Christian sources as well as on Islamic; additionally, the spread of the Arabic language was a much more gradual process. There has been recent research published on this: I mentioned but did not have time to expand on the work of scholars like Patricia Crone (2012), Helen Evans , and Bradie Ratliff (Evans & Ratliff, 2012) who are revising the early history of Islam, dealing with the problem that it is written many years after the events it purports to describe and that it is tends to be anecdotal.

For Chapter 9, Judeo-Spanish

Names for Jewish language varieties remains a source of uncertainty or contention.

In Chapter 9, I express a preference for using the term “Dudezhmo” for the variety of Spanish that was developed in the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire after the expulsion from Spain. I have now been persuaded to use Ladino or Judeo-Spanish, terms preferred by the speakers. For the Moroccan variety of Judeo-Spanish, the accepted term is Haketia. For some scholars, the term Ladino is best kept for the written variety used for Bible translation and religious writing.

For Chapter 12, on Knaanic

There are a number of brief references in the book to a Slavic Jewish variety, called Knaanic by linguists, and some new material has now appeared in the proceedings of a conference on the topic held in 2012.

In Bláha, Dittman, & Uličná (2013), Aslanov (2013) sees Czech Jews as an important bridge between the German and the Slavic Jewish worlds, although he concedes that it is hard to determine whether they were Slavicized Ashkenazim (from Bavaria or Austria) or Ashkenaziced Slavic-speaking Jews from the East. He is not convinced that Jews in the Czech lands used Czech other than as a vehicular language. Beider (2013) on the other hand believes that, before the 13th century, the Jews in the Czech region were Slavic-speaking, switching only later to a Germanic language and developing Yiddish under Bohemian and Moravian influence. Geller (2013) argues that Knaanic glosses provide evidence for a period of multilingualism and support the theory that Eastern Yiddish developed out of Knaanic. Rejecting the commonly accepted theory that Yiddish spread to the Slavic area as a result of mass migration, van Straten (2013) has not found evidence of a large enough demographic change to account for the size of the Jewish population that was later reported; instead, he argues that a comparatively small number of Ashkenazi rabbis and teachers introduced Jewish education and the Yiddish language to local Slavic-speaking Jews who were already resident in the area.

Two papers focus on the term “Knaanic”. In the first, Prudký (2013) questions Roman Jacobson’s explanation that it is just a pun on Slav – slave – and the Talmudic term *eved knaani* - Canaanite or non-Jewish slave (Jakobson & Halle, 1964, 1985). Rather, Canaanite referred in the Bible and later to an alien people. It also was used in defining the language of the region. Canaan, he points out, was a location in which Jews lived as a minority. It was thus reasonably extended to the Jewish-Czech relationship in Bohemia, applied to the region and also to the gentile language and the variety spoken by the Jews. In the second paper, Katz (2013) also traces the origin and later use of the term “Knaanic”, which started, he agrees, as a pun; it was used by later rabbinic scholars to refer to the Slavic glosses listed by Rashi as *leshon Knaan* (language of Canaan). More recently, modern linguists such as Weinreich (1956) and Jakobson & Halle (1964) have interpreted these glosses as proving the existence of a Jewish language, Knaanic, spoken by Czech Jews who later shifted to Yiddish.

Moskovich (2013) does not think there is strong evidence for Knaanic: he asks, was it “a fully fledged Jewish ethnolect” or the gentile vernacular also used by Jews with minor variations? He offers as a compromise the terms “religiolect” or “communal dialect”. He lists some examples of terms of Knaanic provenance in Yiddish. Uličná & Polakovič (2013) also are not convinced about the existence of Knaanic as Judeo-Czech, arguing that the glosses are simply Old Czech.

The proceedings include a number of other papers presented at the conference, many dealing with individual terms and probable etymologies. However, even with access to these new studies, we still are left with an unsolved puzzle: although there seems to be early Jewish knowledge of a Slavic language (most probably Old Czech) that influenced Yiddish, the evidence of the glosses does not prove the existence of a fully developed Jewish language variety that might be named Knaanic.

For Chapter 12, on genetic evidence

In Chapter 12, there is discussion of some genetic studies that that are claimed to cast light on the origin of Yiddish and of the Jews of East Europe. A new paper on the topic has just appeared.

Behar et al. (2013) - in a paper which actually has 30 signatories from 27 different universities - now conclude, on the basis of the recent detailed studies that they have conducted, that there is no evidence of Khazar ancestry for Ashkenazi Jews. Working with a large data set selected from 106 Jewish and non-Jewish populations living in the regions where Ashkenazi Jews may have originated, including samples from fifteen populations in the Caucasus region, they report that Ashkenazi Jews share the greatest genetic similarity with other Jews, and, among non-Jewish populations, with people from Europe and the Middle East. There is no evidence of similarity to populations from the Caucasus. They disagree then with the work of Elhaik (2013), whose studies, in the absence of known descendants of the Khazars, used two south Caucasus populations, Armenians and Georgians, as proxies. This new finding strengthens my conclusion that genetic evidence does not at the moment provide conclusive evidence on the origin of the Yiddish language.

For Chapter 13, Yiddish between the two world wars

At the beginning of the chapter 13, I refer to the dispute between those who argue that Yiddish was showing signs of serious loss between the two World Wars and those who claim that this was in fact its period of greatest cultural and literary growth.

Wasserstein (2012) is one who argues that Yiddish was already declining in the 1930s, while David Fishman (2005) believes this was a high point in Yiddish literature and culture. Some justification for each of these views was provided in a recent talk by Avraham Novershterm at the opening of the Yiddish Winter Course at Beit Ben-Yehuda in Jerusalem on 16 February 2014. He pointed out that after the First World War, major Jewish population centers developed in three cities: Warsaw, Moscow, and New York. Most Jews living in these cities were migrants, for Warsaw and Moscow had previously had restrictions on Jewish settlement and the large migration of Jews to the United States was only at the end of the 19th century. In the early 20th century, each of these three cities had a large enough Yiddish-speaking population to support a number of Yiddish newspapers, magazines, and theatres, and there was a flowering of Yiddish culture and literature. However, there was very little Yiddish education for the next generation, who at best picked up colloquial or "kitchen" Yiddish in the home. Most Jews no longer sent their children to those few religious schools which continued to use Yiddish as language of instruction, and only a tiny group supported the secular Yiddish schools. In each city, Jewish children attended state schools which used the standard language as language of instruction and encouraged assimilation. Jewish children in these cities then were growing up fluent and literate in Polish, Russian or English, with limited and decreasing knowledge of colloquial Yiddish and even less knowledge of Yiddish literature. Thus, the period of the growth of Yiddish language and culture was likely to have been limited to the one immigrant generation.

But of course the argument became irrelevant in Eastern Europe with the Nazi destruction. In Soviet Russia, the creation of a Yiddish culture from 1918 to 1930 had essentially been the work of a small group of communist Jewish organizations and had very little community support (Shneer, 2004) even well before the Communist banning of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the murder of the Yiddish poets. In New York, too, the pressure for English was strong, the Yiddish secular school movement was small and short-lived (Parker, 1978) and there was a continual loss in the numbers claiming Yiddish (in the latest 2011 US survey, more people claim Hebrew than Yiddish). As a result, the Yiddish theaters closed and the newspapers were discontinued: the last Yiddish newspaper, *The Forward,* has since 2013 appeared in print in Yiddish twice weekly and on line daily. Apart from its use by Hasidim, secular maintenance of Yiddish now depends on a small if enthusiastic postvernacular culture (Shandler, 2006).

For chapter 14, Hebrew Charter schools

What about non-Jews learning Hebrew?

In Chapter 14, I would have liked to add a section about the new Hebrew Charter schools in the USA; as they are publicly supported, they admit pupils who are not Jewish and do not teach Jewish religion.

For the Appendix, Yiddish Sign Language did not exist

The appendix provides a list of Jewish language varieties. In the course of ongoing research about the current status of these, I have found new information about Yiddish Sign Language.

The entry for Yiddish Sign Language in *Ethnologue* (2013 edition) is as follows: "Yiddish Sign Language – a language of Israel. ISO 639-3: yds. Language status: 6a (vigorous). Classification: Deaf sign language. "Apparently distinct from Israeli Sign Language."

When I asked her about this, Wendy Sandler, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Haifa and Founding Director of the Sign Language Research Lab there, responded (personal communication Oct 3 2013) that "… I forwarded your inquiry about Yiddish Sign Language to someone I thought might know, but received no answer. In general, sign languages are not connected to spoken languages. Instead, they arise within a community in a particular place. So there is not likely to be a Yiddish Sign Language *per se*. Among Haredim, there is sometimes a stigma about deafness, so that children or adults may not have an opportunity to form a community and create a separate language. I know of no deaf education programs within Yiddish speaking communities (which doesn't mean there are none). If children are sent to a deaf education program, they would likely learn the sign language of the wider community. I have no concrete information, so this is all hypothetical reflecting how sign languages tend to be formed.''

Nancy Brunlehrman, founder of the US based Jewish Deaf Resource Center, knows of no such variety, but wrote (personal communication Oct 6 2013) that American Sign Language includes some signs for words like Shabbat.

Bram Weiser (who interprets Rosh Hashanah services into ASL) also doesn't know about YSL, and notes (as the others do) that sign languages are associated with regions (American, British, Israeli) rather than languages.

Adele Kronick Shuart (1986) who lists many signs for Jewish religious concepts in ASL, writes that "There is no Jewish Sign Language as there is no English Sign Language."

When asked about the listing, Charles Fennig, the Managing Editor of *Ethnologue* responded (personal communication Oct 3 2013): "I did track down the source for this entry in our database. In the preface of his 1990 publication, *Seeing Voices*, Oliver Sacks mentions "Yiddish Sign Language" in a footnote! That seems a bit tenuous as a source, but that is what I found."

In a footnote to the Preface of *Seeing voices*, Sacks (1990) wrote "I use it (sign) to refer to all indigenous sign languages, past and present (e.g., American Sign Language, French Sign, Chinese Sign, Yiddish Sign, Old Kentish Sign)…" [Note 1 to the Preface]. But his assistant says they cannot recall how they came up with the reference, and will probably drop it in future editions.

Yiddish Sign Language is considered a 'spurious language' by Wikipedia. Perhaps spurious is too strong a word. Bencie Woll who is Director of the Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre at University College London (personal communication Oct 9 2013) has a useful explanation: "There of course could not be one 'Yiddish Sign Language'." Woll guessed that Sacks was the origin, since his list includes 'Old Kentish Sign Language' for which there is no evidence whatsoever (it was posited to have existed in the 17th century by Nora Groce in her book *Everyone here spoke sign language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard).*

Woll goes on to note (personal communication 10/10/13) " There are Jewish variants (small lexical differences) of sign languages such as ASL (American Sign Language) and BSL (British Sign Language) which were used by members of the Jewish Deaf communities in those countries, especially at a time when there were special schools for Jewish deaf children. One existed in London until around 1970 and there has been some research on its lexicon but clearly this cannot be considered to be a 'Yiddish Sign Language'. On the other hand it is likely that there were distinctive sign languages used by Deaf communities in Eastern Europe before the war. For example, there was a school for Jewish deaf children in Cracow; I have seen a photo of the building from before the war which says *Yiddishe Toib Shtim Shule* – it is likely that the pupils used 'Yiddish Sign Language' amongst themselves (even if the school officially used spoken Yiddish) and that this was distinct from Polish Sign Language."

As a result, *Ethnologue* will note that YSL is not attested; formal steps are being taken to remove it from the ISO 393-3 listing.

For all readers, an invitation to correct and comment

Throughout the book, I have presented alternative answers to some of the outstanding puzzles in the sociolinguistic history of the Jews. If you have new evidence, or if you believe some of the evidence that I have presented is incorrect, I'd be happy to hear from you. My email address is spolsb@mail.biu.ac.il

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