IMPACT: Studies in Language, Culture and Society
42

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Loss and survival

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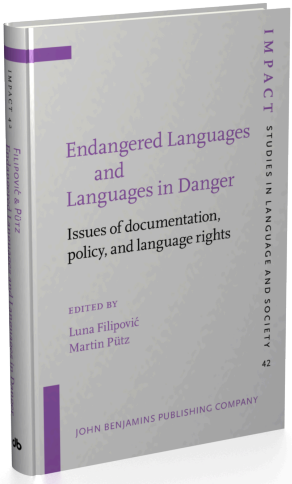
https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.42.17spo



Pages 387–409 of
Endangered Languages and Languages in Danger: Issues of documentation, policy, and language rights
Edited by Luna Filipović and Martin Pütz
[IMPACT: Studies in Language, Culture and Society, 42]
2016. ix, 413 pp.

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Created in the special circumstances of diaspora isolation, persecution, and regular migration, Jewish language varieties that survived the Holocaust have proved, with the exception of Hasidic Yiddish, to be fragile and are becoming extinct as spoken vernaculars. Emancipation, especially when accompanied by admission to public and state schools, generally led to language shift. But postvernacularity, the building of a metalinguistic community through the preservation of the symbolic value of a language in place of its communicative use, has enabled many Jewish groups to maintain the identity associated with their ethnic heritage.

Keywords: diaspora, ethnic heritage, identity, Jewish, loss, migration, shift, postvernacular

1. Fragility and loss of Jewish language varieties

In the introduction to a book of Yiddish stories by the Soviet writer David Bergelson, Werman (1996: xv) describes a memorial meeting she attended in Jerusalem in 1993 for Bergelson and twelve other Yiddish poets murdered on Stalin's orders on August 12, 1952.

> The program began with a girls' choir singing a medley of Yiddish songs, followed by the actress reading one of Hofstein's Yiddish poems. And that ended the sound of Yiddish for the evening – no one else uttered a Yiddish word. The master of ceremonies introduced the speakers in Russian, the speakers addressed the audience in Russian, all the announcements were in Russian, and all the questions from the audience were in Russian. Yiddish, it seems, was reserved for the ceremonial rites: little girls crooning *tumba-la-laika* and aging actresses declaiming Yiddish verses, nostalgic concessions to a remembered past.

DOI 10.1075/impact.42.17spo

An objective review of the current state of Jewish language varieties would find almost all of them in similar straits, extinct or threatened and kept alive by elderly surviving native speakers and the nostalgia of a small group of enthusiasts.[1] Except for a few cases – Yiddish among followers of some Hasidic dynasties (Katz 2004), Juhuri (Shapiro 2010) spoken by Mountain Jews in Israel, some dialects of Judeo-Aramaic (Y. Sabar 2003), and two questionable[2] varieties – Judeo-Georgian (Enoch 2013) and the Marathi of Bene Israel (Weil 2005) – what remains are the fading memories and usage of a few elderly speakers, some written works read by scholars, and a few devotees who are willing to learn but not speak the variety as an everyday language. Ignoring its continuity among followers of some Hasidic dynasties, many people consider even Yiddish to be seriously endangered, and some scholars refer to it as in a "postvernacular" state (Shandler 2006) or as forming the basis of "a metalinguistic community" (Avineri 2012). This status seems to apply also to other surviving varieties like Judeo-Greek (Krivoruchko 2011) and Judeo-Arabic. Some varieties are long gone such as the Judeo-Czech suspected by Jakobson and Halle (1964, 1985) and M. Weinreich (2008) to be the language of the early glosses on medieval Hebrew manuscripts but argued by Czech linguists to be Old Czech written in Hebrew letters (Uličná & Polakovič 2013), or barely survived into the 20th century like Western Yiddish (Jochnowitz 2010; Starck 1994, 2007) or Jewish Malayalam (Gamliel 2013) or Judeo-Spanish[3] (Bunis 2010).

Why did these varieties prove to be so transitory, lacking the loyalty needed to maintain family and vernacular use? First, they developed in very special conditions, in Jewish communities locked or isolating themselves in real or virtual[4] ghettos or mellahs. After the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans

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1. An earlier version of this paper, focused on the loss of Jewish language varieties, was given at the 2014 LAUD conference, and a modified form published as Spolsky (2015). Thinking over discussions at the conference about the nature of language endangerment, I started to wonder about Salikoko Mufwene's notion that language shift should be seen as normal evolutionary adaptation (Mufwene 2001). This paper is then the next stage, which is still being rethought. I am grateful to a reader of the manuscript of this paper for some suggested changes and additions.

2. Generally considered dialects rather than distinct varieties.

3. There is disagreement about the names of Jewish varieties (Bunis 2008). Some scholars argue for Judezmo or Dzhudezmo for the spoken variety of Jewish Spanish that developed in the Balkans and Turkey, preferring to keep Ladino for the written form. Another popular name is Spaniolit.

4. The *shtetlakh* (small towns) of Eastern Europe had a mixed Jewish-gentile population, but the two communities were segregated and they lived separate lives. The ghettos and *Judengasse* of Europe and the mellahs of North Africa were sections of the cities where Jews lived, in minimal contact with the non-Jewish majority.

and the expulsion from their homeland, Jews spread throughout the Diaspora where a sizeable number, perhaps a sixth,[5] maintained their religious and ethnic identity. Like most migrants, Jews tended to live close to each other, a practice strengthened by religious requirements forbidding them to ride on the Sabbath which made it desirable to live within walking distance of a synagogue; they also observed dietary restrictions that discouraged contact with others. As a result, Jews commonly lived in recognizable quarters. Strengthening this segregation, both Christians and Moslems had rules against close association with Jews, under the Pact of Omar[6] (Stillman 1979, 1991), Jewish women were not permitted to use the same bathhouses as Moslem, and both Christians and Moslems had rules against Jews hiring Christian or Moslem servants. In many cases, the Jewish quarters became walled areas that could be defended against repeated attacks by anti-Jewish mobs, urged on by Christian or Muslim clergy. Later, on the model of the Ghetto of Venice, the Jewish quarters were closed off by local governments, and Jews were forced to live in them.[7]

As a result of these measures, Jewish migrants had limited contact with the host gentile community, a situation that encouraged preservation of the languages they brought with them. Only at rare times of tolerance, such as Moslem Spain and pre-Crusader Europe, was there sufficient interaction for anyone other than those doing business with the outside world to achieve fluency in the local language. In addition, the existence of separate educational systems kept Jewish children apart, while at the same time enabling them to gain the literacy that was vital to professional and commercial skills (Botticini & Eckstein 2012) as well as preserving knowledge of Hebrew.

In these circumstances, Jewish language varieties were created by the fusion of an earlier vernacular (Jewish varieties of Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Arabic for instance, brought from countries of earlier residence) with the sacred and literate proficiency in Hebrew and Talmudic Aramaic taught to all Jewish males, and the varied contacts of Jewish professionals and traders and their wives with speakers of the local coterritorial non-Jewish language. A move to a new sociolinguistic environment, either as a result of periodic expulsions by Islamic or Christian rulers, or of voluntary migration seeking new trade and professional opportunities, led

5. The Jewish population is estimated to have dropped from about six million in the first century CE to one million in the eighth.

6. Instituted in the 7th century CE, these rules were modified and variously implemented and continue where Jews remain in Arab lands.

7. Before the Ghetto in Venice was established in 1516, Jewish traders had to leave the island at nightfall (Calimani 1988).

to a change in the sociolinguistic situation and the coterritorial language and was naturally accompanied by the evolutionary development of a new variety.[8] When there was isolation, including the more or less voluntary segregation of Jews and gentiles in the *shtetlakh* of Eastern Europe, and the religiously driven insularity of present-day Hasidim, there could be language maintenance.

2. Shift to the standard

Emancipation and secularization in the modern world produced a new set of conditions: after the French revolution, there were fewer locked communities in Europe,[9] there was freer contact with higher status non-Jewish languages, and the compulsory state secular education led to Jews learning and speaking a standard language, whether Hebrew, German, English, Russian, French, Spanish, Turkish, Persian or whatever, although a Jewish accent may have shown how recently they immigrated. Under these changed conditions, the Jewish language varieties began to be lost after two or three generations of emancipation or emigration to a more tolerant society.

The major exception was Yiddish. Western Yiddish, considered to be the first branch to develop, was preserved in written form in a goodly number of translations of secular romances. It started to be lost as a vernacular with the Enlightenment in 18th century Germany through absorption into the standard variety of German to which its speakers easily switched, although it was still alive in the 19th century: M. Weinreich (2008: 722) notes that the German Jews who migrated to the USA between 1830 and 1870 still spoke it. However, it was no longer expanding and soon died out in Germany (Hutterer 1969); there were vestigial uses in Alsace (Starck 1994, 2007) and Switzerland (Fleischer 2005) where it was kept up especially by horse traders who increased the number of Hebrew words they used in order to keep their conversation unintelligible to German customers (Guggenheim-Grünberg 1954). In both these areas, which were highly multilingual with distinct local varieties, preservation was easier until quite recently, but there are no longer speakers.

Eastern Yiddish however flourished as the vernacular of most Jews and later the written variety of a growing Ashkenazic secular culture (M. Weinreich 2008).

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8. This notion of evolutionary shift of language varieties is expressed by Mufwene (2001, 2005). It agrees with the proposal that we should focus on speakers rather than languages (Labov 2008).

9. In Eastern Europe, until the Revolution Jews were restricted to the Pale of Settlement (Klier 2010).

As long as Jews were restricted to *shtetlakh* in the Pale of Settlement, the small towns which they shared with Slavic-speaking gentiles, providing useful services as innkeepers and traders, their internal literary culture was perhaps limited. Published religious literature was mainly in Hebrew, though an important body of writing started to appear in Yiddish, nominally for "women and illiterate men" (M. Weinreich 2008).

In the early 20th century, however, there were major demographic changes as Jews were permitted to move to larger cities. Yiddish culture reached its zenith in the period between the world wars in three major urban centers, New York, Warsaw and Moscow, each with a population of hundreds of thousands of Jews.[10] This provided the critical mass that was able to support a high Yiddish culture. There were three key positive elements: a large population of Jews for whom Yiddish was the vernacular, speaking the language in everyday life; a strong and growing number of newspapers and magazines (in which books could be published as serials); and a number of Yiddish theatres producing plays regularly. In 1936, there were some 27 daily newspapers and a hundred weeklies published in Poland in Yiddish (U. Weinreich 1949: 165). In 1930, the circulation of the Yiddish daily press in the United States was over half a million.

D. E. Fishman (2005) is fully justified then in agreeing that this was a period of growing strength in Yiddish literature and culture. The major Jewish centers in Moscow, Warsaw and New York were newly formed immigrant communities – in New York, large numbers of Jews started arriving only at the end of the 19th century, a process that was slowed down after the 1927 Immigration Act discriminated against migrants from anywhere except Northern Europe; Moscow had been closed to all but a handful of rich elite Jews until the Russian revolution in 1917; and Warsaw too developed as a Jewish city only in the 20th century. In each, Yiddish high culture depended on a small number of activists and writers, while many Jews were busy assimilating into the general community, sending their children to government public schools which used English in New York, Russian in Moscow, and Polish in Warsaw.

In Warsaw,[11] there was a large number of Jewish schools, supported for a while by government funding that was reduced as a result of developing anti-Semitic attitudes and policies. It appears that Jewish girls, better educated than the general population, were more likely to attend state schools and to shift to Polish, which they taught to their children (Bacon 2009). The increasing separation of

10. There were other centers; Vilna considered itself important, with YIVO (Kuznitz 2014) located there, but it only had about 60,000 Jews.

11. K. Weiser (2015) explains why Warsaw became the center of the Yiddish movement rather than Vilna or Moscow.

the communities is shown by the fact that in the 1921 Polish census, about 75% of Jews claimed Yiddish as their native language, while 80% claimed it in the 1931 census.[12] Increasing numbers of Jews were attending state schools. In 1934–1935, about 250,000 Jewish students were enrolled in Jewish schools and 480,000 in non-Jewish state, municipal and private schools. 80,000 were in Agudas Yisroel *kheyders* and yeshivas, another 48,000 were in private *kheyders* and 20,000 girls in Beth Jacob schools. Thus, nearly twice as many were in schools that used Polish rather than Yiddish or Hebrew.[13] There had been a strong movement for secular Yiddish schools, supported by the Folkparty, led by Noah Prylucki, who from 1918 until he moved to Vilna after the German conquest, led a movement which tried to challenge the Hebrew-based Zionist school movement (K. I. Weiser 2011). The party never gained popular success, and Prylucki and other leaders were killed by the Nazis. Most of the Polish community was wiped out by the Holocaust, so that speculation about a non-existent future is inappropriate.

In the Soviet Union, a strong government policy developed to remove Judaism from the Jewish schools, leading to loss of Hebrew religious terms in Soviet Yiddish and an increase in Russian borrowings (Estraikh 1999). The number of Jewish schools in the Soviet Union was reduced in 1938, by which time the percentage of Jews claiming Yiddish as their first language had fallen from 73% in 1926 to 40% (Estraikh 1999). Hebrew was banned, but Yiddish continued to be recognized and a Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was established to seek international Jewish support for the war against Germany. In 1948, the committee was disbanded and in 1952 thirteen Yiddish poets and writers were arrested and executed after a closed trial. The Soviet Jewish community shifted to Russian.

In New York a network of religious schools continued, the Hasidic schools among them favoring Yiddish, and there was until 1960 a number of secular Yiddish schools (Margolis 2013; Parker 1978; Yefroikin 1955). Most Jews however were educated in public schools; non-Hasidic Jewish schools also largely used English as the language of instruction. The results can be seen in the 2011 US Census (American Community Survey), where there were 162, 511 adults claiming Yiddish as a first language (less than half of the 1980 figure and fewer than the 216,615 claiming Hebrew).

It was possible then that this was a one-generation burst of Yiddish culture, but its stability was not to be tested: in Eastern Europe, after 1939, the Nazis wiped out many of the remaining Yiddish speakers. In the Soviet Union, recognition

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12. Over 10% claimed Hebrew, reflecting commitment to the Hebrew school movement that was developing in interwar Poland.

13. There figures come from Table 12 in Fishman (1991: 402–203).

of Yiddish in the 1920s was reversed by the banning of Yiddish and the arrest and murder of the poets (Shneer 2004). As early as 1922, there had been strong attacks on the Jewish religious schools, in the Communist Yiddish publications which aimed to secularize and Russianize Jewish culture (Shternshis 2006). Even without this, strong pressure for Russian in the school system worked to endanger and weaken Yiddish. So the Soviet encouragement of Yiddish as a minority language continued only as a symbol in Birobidzan. In Moscow and the rest of Russia, Yiddish continued only as the language of elderly Jews and a tiny group who maintained religious observance.

Attempts to establish Yiddish in Israel failed as a result of the growing ideological institutional power of Hebrew. In 1928, a small group of Yiddish writers, members of the left wing Poelei Zion movement (whose 1906 decision to use Hebrew rather than Yiddish in its publication had been a turning point in the revival of Hebrew), started a magazine that was intended to form a base for the masses of Yiddish speaking immigrants that they expected who would swamp Hebrew speakers. They did not arrive, partly because European Jews were not ready to go to Israel (the majority of religious leaders was anti-Zionist) and partly because of the British restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine. When the survivors finally did come after the establishment of the State, the Yiddish speakers from East Europe were balanced by a large immigration of Jews expelled from Arab lands, non-speakers of Yiddish, so that Hebrew easily maintained its position as not just official but also a needed lingua franca (Spolsky & Shohamy 1999).

Yiddish speaking Jews in the Soviet Union had been the first target of the invading Nazi army, which wiped out the Yiddish speakers of Poland and other Eastern European countries. Jews who survived or returned to Poland after the war suffered a new set of anti-Jewish activities in 1944–1946, leading to further emigration; thus, of 300,000 Jews in Warsaw before the war, there are now between 5000 and 20,000 Jews in the country as a whole, and Yiddish is only spoken by an elderly remnant, although there are reports of some cultural revival; a Jewish State Theatre continues in Warsaw.

Those Yiddish speakers who moved west and continued to the Americas also came under external pressure. In Belgium, a small ultra-orthodox group maintained separation and Yiddish around the diamond industry but by now most are also proficient in French, Dutch, and Hebrew. In England, Yiddish speaking refugees were urged by their leaders to learn the English needed for economic success and social acceptance: only in Stamford Hill does a small block of Hasidim remain some of whose sons are introduced to Yiddish when they begin religious education. The pattern in the USA was similar; in New York, the Yiddish theatres and the Yiddish newspapers did not survive the passing of the immigrant generation.

Nazi genocide and Soviet anti-Jewish activity wiped out the large Eastern Yiddish speech communities, leaving a small group of activists studying the modern literature and mourning the loss of the language, which has been adopted as a new means of closing off an ultra-orthodox Jewish life in some Hasidic sects (especially Satmar) whose males acquire it when they start to attend religious schools at the age of six. In all, Yiddish between the two world wars does illustrate a key feature of Jewish languages: their fragility even when strong.[14]

In the case of Jewish languages other than Yiddish, all lacking the institutional support of governments (token recognition of Yiddish by the Israeli government and some Scandinavian countries is virtually meaningless), a strong school system (provided for some Hasidic boys but not for any other Jewish language apart from Hebrew), and a vibrant literature, the languages may soon be of interest only to scholars and enthusiasts. There is perhaps a lesson for other endangered language activists: full maintenance of a language depends on a consensual ideology (belief in the value of the variety), encouragement of practice (provision of opportunities for use whether literary or in other media, and in important social functions including especially education), and continued efforts to achieve recognition by the community and government. In a set of essays on the sociology of Yiddish, Fishman (1991:310) notes that the only upward trend in indicators is the number of tertiary level courses; however, he argues throughout that it still lives and may well be further restored.

In the absence of institutional support and educational programs, Jewish languages depended for survival on the continued immigration of speakers (as is the case with Spanish in the US) or continued segregation imposed either internally (as with the Amish and the Hasidim) or externally (as in the ghettos and with US Blacks). But Jewish education, even before it was replaced after Emancipation by public schooling in the dominant state language, was strongly weighted towards the Hebrew-Aramaic of liturgy and sacred texts rather than the Jewish varieties in which it was often taught.

Lacking the status of Hebrew-Aramaic and the modern intellectual elite supporting Yiddish in Eastern Europe and the Americas in the first half of the 20th century, the other Jewish varieties have been easy prey to the standard varieties introduced through schooling. One such force was towards French, in North Africa and the Middle East, the result of language diffusion efforts conducted by the Alliance Universelle Israélite, a Jewish supported but government encouraged organization which established French medium schooling for Jewish children in

14. I am grateful to a talk by Avraham Novoshterm on 16 February 2014 at the opening of the Yiddish Winter Course at (ironically) Beit Ben Yehuda in Jerusalem given (another irony) in English.

many schools in the Mediterranean region. This was reinforced by the government schools in North Africa under French rule; Muslims were reluctant to attend, but Jews and Christians took advantage of them and sent their children to schools that promised educational and economic advantage. The shift to French led to the weakening of both Hakétia, the Moroccan variety of Judeo-Spanish, and the various forms of Judeo-Arabic that had served not just as internal community languages, but that had produced an important religious literature, both of sacred poetry that formed an important part of synagogue ritual and for the writing of philosophical work and religious commentaries that marked the Jewish contribution to the Middle Arabic used by non-Muslims (Hary 1995, 2009). Both Judeo-Arabic and Hakétia came up against the pressure of Hebrew hegemony when the Jews in Moslem countries were expelled and moved to Israel; similarly, those North African Jews who moved to France continued their growing commitment to the higher status French language.

The independence of Greece and Bulgaria changed the status of the Judeo-Spanish speaking Jews of the Ottoman empire who had been protected by the tolerance of the *millet* system that recognized minorities. Later, Greek and Bulgarian nationalism led to the loss of the widespread Judeo-Spanish which had developed there after the expulsion from Spain. When Salonika came under Greek rule, the large Jewish population needed to add Greek to their repertoire and the role of Judeo-Spanish was diminished (Naar 2011); there was some migration to Israel and the USA, and most of the remaining Jewish population was killed at Auschwitz by the Nazis. In Turkey, like North Africa, the French introduced by the Alliance schools became a language of the Jews, weakening the Judeo-Spanish that had been brought from Spain and that was starting to build a modern variety. By the 1920s, French was well established in the Turkish Jewish community and threatening Judeo-Spanish (Sarhon 2011). Both French and Judeo-Spanish were to be replaced by the Turkish promulgated and enforced by Kemal Ataturk after the revolution (G. Lewis 1999). The process of shift is confirmed by the recent publication of a Jewish bible and prayer book with translation into Turkish. But there remains a nostalgia for Judeo-Spanish that shows up in various postvernacular activities (Kushner-Bishop 2004a, 2004b) in Israel and the USA.[15]

Judeo-Arabic varieties, developed by Jews living in the countries that had been conquered by Islam, also showed vulnerable language loyalty. Jews in those Arab countries where they were permitted to live (Saudi Arabia was early declared to be only for Moslems) were tolerated along with Christians and Zoroastrians, but only in the status of *dhimmitude* (Stillman 1979, 1991; Ye'or 1985), governed

15. But the 2011 Community Survey in the US reports only 136 speakers of Ladino; the figure is so low presumably they reported their language as Spanish.

by unevenly imposed rules that kept them as second class subjects, set head taxes, forbade them to employ Moslem servants and their women to use the same bathhouses as Moslems, and restricted their access to the classical language of the Qur'an.[16] Jews in these countries maintained their own educational systems, which taught boys Hebrew sacred texts through vernacular Judeo-Arabic. When the choice of education in French was offered in 19th century North Africa, it was quickly taken up. When Jews were expelled from Arab countries after the United Nations decision in 1947 to partition Palestine, those who went to France shifted to French and those who immigrated to Israel soon shifted to Hebrew, albeit for a while a marked Sephardic variety.

Both Turkey and Persia, while being conquered and ultimately converted by Islam, had not become Arabic speaking. The Jews, who had lived in Persia since the Babylonian Exile, spoke a number of different varieties (Shapira 2003). A strong Judeo-Persian literature developed over the centuries (Fischel 1960; Spicehandler 1968) and local spoken Jewish varieties were still preserved by older immigrants to Israel from the smaller centers, but younger and better educated Persian Jews had developed control of Farsi, the national language, even before emigration.

There were also Jewish varieties of other Iranian languages, including Yazdi and Kurdish, but these too were lost once there was access to public education and mass media. Kaganovitch (2008) reports on the Bukharan Diaspora; and the Endangered Language Alliance is studying Bukhori maintenance in the large community in Queens New York, finding that older members still speak the language regularly, but few young people use it. In the 1920s, the Soviets had encouraged activity in Bukhori and Judeo-Tajik, but this policy was not continued and Russian was promoted. Also in the 1920s, there was Soviet support for publications and other activities in Judeo-Tajik, but school use and publication were banned in 1940, with a consequent shift to Tajik, Russian and Uzbek; after immigration to Israel in the 1970s, some cultural activities in Judeo-Tajik re-emerged. In Israel and Russia, there is a survival of Judeo-Tat, the language of the Mountain Jews, also known as Juhuri, but younger speakers are reported to be shifting to Russian and to Hebrew.[17]

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16. There were exceptions, as in Spain before the Christian reconquest, and more oppressive measures, as the forbidding of riding camels and horses in Yemen which lasted as long as Jews were allowed to live there.

17. "At present there are about 100,000 Caucasian Jews living in Israel, most of them in Acre, Haifa, Be'er Sheva, Hadera, or Akiva, Netanya, Ashdod and Ashkelon", reports Litman (2010). She cites Vitaly Shalem, who wrote an MA thesis on Mountain Jews, saying that only in northern Azerbaijan are there children speaking Juhuri to each other; she also quotes Boris

In other Islamic countries where Arabic did not replace other languages, varieties of Aramaic continued to be spoken by Christians (800,000[18]) and Jews (perhaps 25,000), though in Iraq where roads allowed easy access, there was a shift to Arabic (Y. Sabar 2003). Zakho was an important city, and Jews from there kept up the variety alongside Kurdish for communication with non-Jews, Hebrew for religious purposes, and Russian for schooling (A. Sabar 2008). But most of the Jewish dialects are now extinct or virtually so: Barzani Jewish Neo-Aramaic, Lishana Deni, Lishana Noshan, Lishan Didan. There are said to still be speakers of Hulaulà in Israel (Hezy Mutzafi, personal communication).

In Italy, not united linguistically until the 20th century with dialects still important (Lepschy & Lepschy 1998), Jewish language varieties were derived from the regional dialects (Jochnowitz 2013). There was a variety of Judeo-Piedmontese whose final stages are recorded by Primo Levi (Jochnowitz 1981; George Jochnowitz Levi 1985). Jochnowitz (n.d.) refers to a Judeo-Mantuan dialect. There was a Jewish variety of Venetian (Fortis & Zolli 1979), and a Florentine variety (Jochnowitz 1978). Probably the only surviving variety is the Roman one, Giudaico-Romanesco, still being used in the 1980s through the encouragement of a theatre group of young adults (de Benedetti 1997). Here too, we have evidence of a nostalgic vestigial use of a Jewish variety.

The variety spoken by Georgian Jews is a border-line case, the result of a 20th century debate in the Jewish community over identity. Three points of view emerged: one position was taken by traditional rabbinical leadership who were afraid that emancipation could destroy the centrality of the synagogue; a second was that of the assimilators who called for Jews to be Georgians with a Jewish faith; and the third, led by the Zionists, who wanted to integrate Georgian Jews with international Jewry, stressed Jewish identity and the place of Israel. That the Zionists won out is shown by the immigration of the largest proportion of Georgian Jews to Israel in the 1970s. Since the 1980s, all this has been expressed in a widespread belief that Georgian-Jewish relations were always friendly and warm (Kakitelashvili 2012). Linguistically, this view is supported by the closeness of the Jewish variety to the standard. Wikipedia claims that there are about 85,000 speakers of "Judaeo-Georgian" including 20,000 speakers in Georgia (a 1995 estimate), and about 59,800 speakers in Israel (a 2000 estimate); it also reports approximately 4,000 speakers in New York and undetermined numbers in Russia, Belgium, Canada and elsewhere in the USA. *Ethnologue* (M. P. Lewis, Simons & Fennig

Hanukayev, who still writes in the language, reporting that few Israeli Mountain Jews speak Juhuri to their children.

18. Before the attacks by the Islamic State currently taking place in northern Iraq (Perlin 2014), killing or driving out Aramaic-speaking Christians.

2013) is more cautious, echoing Friedman (2010) in suggesting that it is perhaps just Georgian with some added Hebrew lexicon. Friedman (2010: 118) considers it "an ethnolect of Georgian like the English of American Jews for English." Moskovich and Ben Oren (1981) conclude that "while it is widely held that there is no Judeo-Georgian language, and Georgian Jews themselves claim they speak Georgian, there are many Hebrew and Aramaic loanwords and calques in three levels of Judeo-Georgian speech: everyday communication (less among younger speakers), Bible and Talmud interpretation, and argot." Enoch (2013) has studied the Hebrew components of Judeo-Georgian.

Asian Jewish varieties have also largely disappeared. In India, Jews in Cochin formed two communities, maintaining the separation between castes practiced in Kerala and elsewhere in India. The Malabari (Black) Jews claim to be descended from traders who arrived at the time of Solomon.[19] The Paradesi (White) Jews arrived in the 16th century, after the expulsion from Spain. Both groups spoke a variety of Jewish Malayalam different from (but mutually intelligible with) the language of Kerala, but the variety seems to be no longer spoken by those Jews who remain in Kerala and to be virtually extinct among those who emigrated to Israel between 1950 and 1970 (Gamliel 2013).

3. Survival through postvernacular practices in a metalinguistic community

This rounds out the story of loss, but I have already hinted at cases of partial survival. If we treat Georgian as not being a Jewish variety, then it fits with all the other immigrant languages (Russian, French, English, Amharic, and so on) brought to Israel. Their loss is part of a study of immigrant language shift and the existence of the language in its homeland is not threatened by what happens in any one diaspora. It is rather the recognized Jewish language varieties like Yiddish and Ladino and Juhuri and Judeo-Aramaic that are our topic.

The earlier part of this paper has shown the fragility of Jewish varieties, the low level of loyalty, and the ease with which they disappear in changing environments. There are two counterforces that we need to note. The first is the case of some ultra-orthodox sects of Hasidim who have established an educational system mainly for boys that guarantees their proficiency in Yiddish and enables them to maintain isolation not just from the non-Jewish world, building their own voluntary ghetto and sharing the special dress and food laws that keep them separate, but also from other Jews with more modern ways of life. The second is

19. For discussion of Black Jews, see Spolsky (2014: 92–93).

the recent growth of what Shandler labels *postvernacularity* as some Jews choose various activities (courses, clubs, web lists, theater, camps) to maintain and build endangered heritage languages and varieties. What the two may have in common is that they can manage without natural intergenerational transmission because they provide other methods of teaching or learning languages; what divides them is that the Hasidim aim at daily vernacular language use, keeping a special status for Hebrew-Aramaic as language of study and prayer, a status which the secular Yiddishists assign to their heritage language,[20] using the common local vernacular for daily life.

The concept "postvernacular" is usually attributed to Shandler's study of "Yiddishland", but there seems to have been earlier uses: Preston (2004: 153) uses it to mean the learning of any language after the first. Coining the term for the situation of Yiddish is also claimed by Kuznitz (2004).[21] Shandler (2006: 4) defines postvernacularity as "having an affective or ideological relationship with Yiddish without having command of the language." The same phenomenon is described by Avineri (2012, 2014) as the creation of a "metalinguistic community which talks about a language rather than speaking it." Applying this distinction clearly excludes Hasidic vernacular proficiency and use, but if we employ Preston's definition of a language acquired other than as a first language, we might consider the teaching of Yiddish to boys when they start *heder* and to girls in Yiddish classes in school to include a proportion of Hasidic Yiddish in the same category.[22] Proficiency and daily use however suggest it is better to keep secular and Hasidic Yiddish apart.

That being the case, what then are the features of postvernacular status that implement the "affective or ideological relationship"? Fundamental, Shandler (2006: 4) says, is that Yiddish moves from earlier instrumental and communicative use to a secondary, meta-level status with symbolic value replacing semantic. Postvernacularity, signs of which emerged even before World War II, means that Yiddish hasn't been lost, but its status in the Jewish linguistic repertoire has been changed. It has had to deal with the challenge of comparison originally with German and now with Hebrew and English, each standing not just for the outside world but also representing modernity and a higher culture. Yiddish postvernacularity is now associated with an imagined Yiddishland, a recreated idealized virtual *shtetl*, where the language substitutes for the homeland.

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20. Fishman (2002) argues that since the Shoah, Yiddish is a holy language.

21. Margolis (2011) attributes it to both Shandler and Kuznitz.

22. Some Hasidim speak Yiddish to their babies, more outside than inside Israel (Fader 2001). Katz (2004) believes that the numbers are high enough to guarantee the future of Hasidic Yiddish.

Shandler lists some of the activities that implement this ideology. First is the teaching of the language, which for generations was unnecessary because Jews spoke it from childhood. Yiddish language schools developed, he says, only during and after the First World War, in Poland and Lithuania mainly, where they competed with Zionist schools which taught in Hebrew and the state schools which used the national languages. With state recognition, Yiddish schools received government support in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s (Shneer 2004). But this ended with the Second World War and the Holocaust.

Starting in the late 19th century, two million Jews had emigrated from Eastern Europe to the United States, where most were persuaded to shift to English. Some religious education continued in Yiddish, expanded after the arrival of Satmar and other Hasidic communities after the war. A network of secular Yiddish schools also existed until 1960 (Freidenreich 2010), and Yiddish was introduced into university studies, especially with the publication of *College English* by U. Weinreich (1949). This teaching has continued with the offering of many Yiddish language courses for adults, but there has been nothing like the early childhood program that played a major part in the regeneration of Māori in New Zealand or the intensive Hebrew *ulpan* for new immigrants in Israel. Avineri (2012) calls this continuing teaching "nostalgia socialization". Postvernacularity now means teaching mainly adults, and aiming for some knowledge but not for daily use.

Another feature is the borrowing of Hebrew and Yiddish words and phrases into the new host language. This may be a sign that speakers are new immigrants learning a new language, code-switching and borrowing terms they do not know in the language, a normal process in language shift. But Benor (2012) has drawn attention to a reverse of this process, as fluent native speakers of English (and probably French and Spanish too) add Hebrew-Aramaic and Yiddish terms and expressions to their speech in order to show their status as newly-observant Jews, signaling their growing identity with speakers of Yiddish without actually speaking it. This too is surely a feature of postvernacularity, a kind of limited learning with important symbolic meaning.[23] In contrast, the continuing vernacular use of Hasidic Yiddish is marked by borrowing from English. Katz (2004:380) sees this as a sign of life, and notes that it is one of the complaints of modern secular Yiddish scholars about the variety.

The second feature that Shandler mentions is translation, a well established Jewish practice: the Talmud interprets a phrase in the Book of Ezra as suggesting that the Targum in Aramaic began to be added to the synagogue ritual soon after the return from the Babylonian Exile. For Yiddish, it may be exemplified by the

23. Benor suggests that it may be the way in which a new variety of Jewish English is being created.

Tsene-rene, first published about 1600 and still in print, a collection of Bible translations and commentaries in Yiddish intended for women. In the 19th and early 20th century, while there was still a large Yiddish speaking and reading public, there was also a good deal of translation of world literature into Yiddish.[24] In the 20th century, however, translation started in the opposite direction, with publication of many works of Yiddish literature in English or Hebrew or other languages more accessible to the postvernacular readership.[25]

The next feature of postvernacularity that Shandler describes he calls "performance art", which ranges from two academics speaking Yiddish to each other loudly at a conference to the *yidish-vokh* (Yiddish week) that Mordke Schaechter initiated in 1975, a week long Yiddish family immersion retreat conducted every summer in the USA. Similar events are also sponsored by *Yugntruf*, a young adult association formed in 1964 in the US to encourage the maintenance of Yiddish. The fact that these activities are concentrated on adults rather than the kind of pre-school and primary immersion teaching that was the core of Māori revival activities (see for example Spolsky, 1987, 2005, 2010) and that is the core element in Hasidic Yiddish education is further evidence of postvernacularity. This is a good place to recall that YIVO was conceived as a university level research institute to cap the existing school programs, and that it continues in this higher role as a major supporter of postvernacular activity (Kuznitz 2014).

Theater is another area of Yiddish performativity. There were in fact a dozen or more Yiddish theaters in the USA up to the Second World War, and National Yiddish Theater *Folksbiene* founded in 1915 still exists in New York. In Israel, there is also a Yiddish theater company, *Yiddishspiel,* founded in1987, that gives regular performances of plays and musical comedy in Tel Aviv and other cities.[26] Shandler also makes reference (p. 55) to the growing number of websites that encourage use of Yiddish, one of the more prominent of which is the remaining US Yiddish newspaper, *Forvertz*, which illustrates the working of postvernacularity by not only having an English edition, but a Yiddish edition which provides both a translation and a dictionary look-up app for every Yiddish word.

The *Forvertz* on-line translations and the surtitles used by *Yiddishspiel* and sub-titles in movies demonstrate a central feature of postvernacularity – access to the language and its symbolic heritage identity is made possible even for those

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24. There is no evidence for a book with the title "Shakespeare translated into Yiddish and improved".

25. Isaac Bashevis Singer won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978.

26. The website notes that thanks to a subvention from the Poalim Fund, "Yiddishspiel productions are surtitled with simultaneous translations in Hebrew and in Russia."

who are not fully proficient in it. It is a cheap but effective means of maintaining the value of a heritage language. At the same time, it can serve as an entrance to greater knowledge and use of the language: the immersion camps and the classes start at the beginner's level, but those who are committed and continue can reach higher ranges of mastery.

Use of the internet to support postvernacular activities has been recognized by a special issue of the journal *Language & Communication*.[27] Benor (2011) introduces the issue, asserting that the internet is a valuable way to preserve endangered languages. Sadan (2011) describes websites for Yiddish, suggesting that still more can be done. Ladino websites are discussed by Brink-Danan (2011), analyzing in particular how activists explore and debate the notion of what she calls "Ladinoland." In a detailed review of the postvernacular developments of the several varieties of Judeo-Greek, no longer spoken but still attracting feelings of nostalgia, Krivoruchko (2011) considers the situation among Jews in Greece, and the imagined Greek identities of those who have emigrated to Israel and the USA. E. M. Dean-Olmsted (2011, 2012) studying the Syrian Jewish community in Mexico City shows how uses and definitions of terms for sub-groups reflect changes in attitudes within the community.

There are reports of postvernacular activities for other Jewish language varieties. The two institutions established by the Israeli government, the National Authority for Yiddish Culture and the National Authority for Ladino essentially fit this pattern. There is a World Congress for Georgian Jews, but its website is in standard Georgian. There are two theater companies in Israel which present plays in some smaller cities in Judeo-Arabic (Henschke 2014). A Kol Israel radio station, *Reka*, broadcasts a daily program in Judeo-Moroccan. There are said to be monthly meetings in Jerusalem of Jews from Zakho speaking a variety of Judeo-Aramaic.

All these postvernacular practices serve to maintain language-related identity for the Jewish groups, a kind of *landsmanshaft* (hometown society) that provides spiritual support rather than the practical financial and social support of the New York based immigrant societies. They are a way for the third generation to reproduce (or reinvent) aspects of their grandparents' culture, using the language as a symbolic connection. True, it doesn't preserve the language as a functioning vernacular for linguists to analyze, but it does preserve identity for the metalinguistic community who see it as a cherished heritage.

27. Volume 31, number 2, edited by Sarah Benor and Tzvi Sadan.

4. Hasidic Yiddish maintenance

It is only Yiddish that still has speakers among Hasidic sects committed to continued use of the language as a vernacular, although even among Hasidim there appears to be a division between males who use it from the time they begin *heder* at the age of 6, and the females who are more likely to be proficient in Hebrew in Israel and English in the US. Given the tendency of modern Hasidic dynasties to splinter, usually associated with a dispute over succession in leadership, and the closed nature of the Haredi world with its resistance to modernity including censuses and scientific study, it is hard to find precise details of numbers or language patterns. Based generally either in Israel or in the USA, there are also important Hasidic communities in London and Antwerp. Each group is known by the city of origin of its dynasty. The largest nine are Belz (mainly now in Israel, about 7,000 families), Bobov (headquartered in Borough Park, Brooklyn, about 10,000 followers), Lubavich (Chabad, its center in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, with a major settlement in Israel and missionaries spread through the world, with perhaps as many as 200,000 followers), Ger (located in Jerusalem, about 13,000 families), Karlin-Stolin (Israel), Sanz Klausenberg (divided between Borough Park and Kiriat Sanz in Israel), Satmar (in Kirias Joel and Williamsburg, New York, about 150,000 worldwide), Skvar (New Square, New York, about 20,000 followers), and Vizhnitz (New York and Bnei Brak, Israel, about 5000 followers). There are at least 28 other smaller dynasties, and many other tiny ones which survived the Holocaust. While they share many common features, they vary in details of practice, such as dress, liturgy, food, and language policy, making generalization difficult. But most share in recognizing the basic importance of Yiddish as a language for teaching sacred Hebrew-Aramaic texts and also for home and daily life, with education of boys in Yiddish especially important.

Given the complexity and the number of groups, there have been only a few studies with sufficient detail to summarize language patterns, but there is general consensus with the opinion of Katz (2004) that the Hasidic world is the main bastion of Yiddish vernacular continuity. As a general rule, most Hasidic communities contain a majority of adult speakers of Yiddish, the language commonly of their communal life. Some even use it writing, though the emphasis is on writing in Hebrew.

But it is more difficult to decide on the method of intergenerational transmission. Studies such as Baumel (2006) and Fader (2009) seem to suggest two complementary patterns. In one, noted more in the diaspora communities than in Israel, and more in the isolating sects like Satmar and rare in Lubavitcher, Yiddish is spoken in the family and to young children, demonstrating the "natural" transmission that language activists seek. In the USA, Satmar boys, it is reported,

do not meet English until it is taught them as a foreign language to be used to present the stigmatized but state-required secular studies. A common pattern is that Hasidic boys are brought up by mothers speaking the local language (English in the US and the UK, Hebrew in Israel) and meet Yiddish as the main language of instruction when they start *heder* at the age of six; most are fluent by the time they reach Yeshiva, but in the United Kingdom, Ger boys are reported to have difficulty with Yiddish even when they reach bar mitzvah age. In Hasidic boys' schools, religious subjects which are considered the most important component are taught in Yiddish (or *Leshon Hakoydesh* – a modified Hebrew-Aramaic), while any secular subjects may be taught in the local language. In most Hasidic girls' schools, on the other hand, teaching is in the local language, with some classes for Yiddish added to the curriculum.

Thus, Yiddish in the Hasidic world shares aspects of vernacularity (its widespread use as a daily language of home, school, and community, and some transmission at home to young children) with some aspects of postvernacularity, especially the dependence on school teaching of the language.

5. Postvernacular practices as a goal for threatened varieties

This evidence of the existence of postvernacularity as an evolutionary development in the changed sociolinguistic environment that led to the loss of Jewish language varieties in the 20th century perhaps offers a clue to possible goals for other endangered languages. The example of Hasidic Yiddish shows that maintenance of sufficient proficiency for regular everyday use is possible, but it demands strict discipline and willingness to isolate the community from many aspects of modern life. But even in the case of Hasidic Yiddish, it appears that school teaching (a key feature of postvernacularity) is a major element in preservation; there is some natural intergenerational transmission, but it is perhaps not a necessary feature. Of course, in cases where an endangered language continues to be spoken to young children (e.g. Catalan, many South American Indian languages, Inuit, Northern Sami, Welsh in the north), a logical goal of reversing language shift is to protect maintenance by raising the status of the language to make it able to resist the pressure of the standard language. But where the language is no longer spoken in the family and to young children, the continuity of ethnic and group identity may well be served by accepting postvernacularity as a goal and not a regrettable defeat. After all, Hebrew was maintained in a postvernacular status for two millennia by an educational system. From this point of view, one wonders if the concern over the failure to persuade Māori to use their language in the home and to develop Māori language education much beyond the elementary school

is as serious a tragedy as some now claim (Bauer 2008; Harlow & Barbour 2014; May & Hill in press).

If we accept the suggestion of Mufwene (2001) that language shift is a normal evolutionary response to changes in sociolinguistic environment, as stronger languages continue to dominate weaker (de Swaan, 1998a, 1998b, 2001), then perhaps postvernacularity, the building of a metalinguistic community, offers a way to preserve the symbolic identity value of a beloved language (J. A. Fishman 1997).

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