HEBREW IN ASHKENAZ
A Language in Exile

Edited by LEWIS GLINERT
Hebrew in Ashkenaz
A LANGUAGE IN EXILE

EDITED BY

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The Phonology of Ashkenazic

DOVID KATZ

I rejoice and thank God with all my heart that He made me an Ashkenazic Jew in my pronunciation.

Jacob Emden 1761:§53

The Notion “Ashkenazic”

Ashkenazic Hebrew and Ashkenazic Aramaic

The terms “Ashkenazi(c) Hebrew” and “Ashkenazi(c) pronunciation” are often encountered in reference to the pronunciations of Hebrew deriving from central and eastern Europe. These terms are fine for continued general use but more precision is needed in a study of the subject. For one thing, Ashkenazic Hebrew involves a lot more than pronunciation: it comprises a set of characteristic features in lexicon, semantics, morphology, and syntax (see e.g., Noble 1958). For another, the Ashkenazic sound pattern applies equally to Aramaic. The work at hand calls for a term limited to pronunciation, but encompassing Aramaic as well as Hebrew. I shall use the noun “Ashkenazim” for the phonological system used by traditional Ashkenazim in their pronunciation of Hebrew and Aramaic.

For around a thousand years, Ashkenazim thrived in Ashkenaz, the Jewish culture area that covered much of central and eastern Europe and comprised the geographically and demographically largest speech community in Jewish history. Following the Holocaust, Ashkenazim survives among some of its progeny worldwide, most perfectly so among a number of the more traditional Hasidic and yeshiva-centered communities. In other communities, both in Israel and around the world, its use has diminished sharply, or disappeared, in response to a conscious campaign of discreditation and denigration, the roots of which can be traced, ultimately, to the “Berlin Enlightenment” of the late eighteenth century. Reference to “Ashkenaz,” “Ashkenazim,” and “Ashkenazic” in this study involves the linguistic state of affairs in pre-war central and eastern Europe, and in traditional communities today around the world.
Internal Jewish Trilingualism in Ashkenaz

In order to fathom the place of Ashkenazic in linguistic and cultural history, we must bear in mind its multilingual environment. In addition to varying degrees of mastery of local non-Jewish languages, Ashkenazim have three distinct Jewish languages, Yiddish, Hebrew, and Aramaic, which participate in a unique trilingualism (see Katz 1985: 98). Yiddish (itself containing a Hebrew and Aramaic component) is the only vernacular in traditional Ashkenazic culture. Hebrew and Aramaic, although nonvernacular, are, in Ashkenaz, very much alive, used in reading, study, prayer, declaiming, singing, and in quoting from classical texts. They are “uttered” in the course of these activities, thus meeting the proposed definition of Ashkenazic as a phonological system. Moreover, Hebrew and Aramaic thrive as literary languages, and the degree to which writers and readers “mentally utter” the phonological representations of these texts is an issue open to study.

In writing, the three Jewish languages of Ashkenaz complemented each other in part. Yiddish dominated popular literature and intimate personal written communication. Hebrew occupied in social terms the broad educated middle ground of communal, rabbinic, and more formal written communication, Bible and Mishnah commentaries, and works on customs and ethics. Aramaic was the principal language of much talmudic and kabbalistic literature. None of the three languages of Ashkenaz was “low-prestige” or “stigmatized” in any modern sense of these terms. Such notions arose later as a consequence of the Enlightenment and its various offshoots. All three had their accepted and unquestioned place in the eyes of the society in question, and those are the eyes that count. An absence of “low prestige” does not imply an absence of “high prestige.” Sociological “highness” was clearly linked with knowledge, learning, and creativity and can be charted on an upward curve from the universally known Yiddish to the more select and learned Hebrew through to the most select and learned Aramaic language of the two most profound and esoteric branches of the culture: the jurisprudence of the Talmud and the mysticism of the Kabbalah. Moreover, those parts of the liturgy that are in Aramaic, although a minority, have the greatest psychological sanctity, including the kaddish prayer for the dead, and the Kol Nidre on the Day of Atonement. The often-encountered notion that Hebrew and Aramaic had somehow blended in Ashkenaz into a hodge-podge, sometimes called “Hebrew-Aramaic” (“Hebrew-hyphen-Aramaic”), is mistaken. To be sure, Hebrew has its Aramaic component, and (Jewish) Aramaic its Hebrew component, but never did the twain merge in lexicon, morphology, or grammatical machinery (see Katz 1985: 98), and a monograph would prove this. They did merge phonologically, however, hence the term and the concept “Ashkenazic.”

The Work at Hand

I shall propose principles and methodology concerning the structure, origin, and history of Ashkenazic and its relation to both the antecedent Hebrew and Aramaic and to contemporary Yiddish. The ideas offered differ sharply from the views that

Dialectological Framework

Classification of Yiddish Dialects

Nearly all late twentieth-century forms of both Yiddish and Ashkenazic derive from the territory of “Eastern Yiddish,” in the Slavonic and Baltic lands. Eastern Yiddish comprises three major dialect areas: (1) Northeastern Yiddish (popularly “Lithuanian”) on the territory of ethnographic Lithuania, Latvia, White Russia; (2) MidEastern Yiddish (popularly “Polish”) on the territory of ethnographic Poland and parts of Hungary and Czechoslovakia; and (3) Southeastern Yiddish (popularly “Ukrainian”) on the territory of ethnographic Ukraine, Bessarabia, and Romania.

The no-longer spoken varieties of “Western Yiddish” may also be subdivided into three major dialect areas: (1) Northwestern Yiddish (Netherlands, northern Germany); (2) Midwestern Yiddish (central Germany); and (3) Southwestern Yiddish (Alsace, Switzerland, southern Germany). There are two major intermediate areas: (1) Northern Transitional Yiddish (East Prussia; see Katz 1988a: 43–53) and Southern Transitional Yiddish (parts of Czechoslovakia and Hungary), also known, after U. Weinreich (1964), as Transcarpathian Yiddish. These classifications follow Katz (1983b).

Coterminous Dialect Areas

The dialect areas of Yiddish and Ashkenazic are coterminous. Thus, Northeastern Yiddish is coterritorial with Northeastern Ashkenazic, Southwestern Yiddish with Southwestern Ashkenazic, and so forth. The identity of the geolinguistic patterning is determined by the identity of the speakers: a Northeastern Yiddish speaker in traditional Ashkenaz is by definition a user of Northeastern Ashkenazic.

The Vowel Systems of Yiddish Dialects

Primacy of Vernacular Phonology

Neither Hebrew nor Aramaic was anybody’s native language in Ashkenaz. An abstraction of the phonology of these sacred languages without reference to their
users’ native language would be folly, firstly because it is spoken language that divulges the true phonology of a speaker, and secondly because, in the society in question, the links between the vernacular and the two sacred languages were profound for virtually the entire population (cf. M. Weinreich 1973: 1:251–320; 3:253–331). The most profound linguistic link is the cooccurrence, in different phonological guise, of thousands of items from the sacred languages in the vernacular.

As a point of departure, therefore, Ashkenazic is best conceived from the perspective of the coterritorial Yiddish dialect, and, especially, the dialect’s “Semitic component.” The Semitic component in Yiddish, comprising the parts of the language deriving from Hebrew or Aramaic, is synchronically fused with the quantitatively much larger Germanic component. These two Pan-Yiddish components (Eastern Yiddish has, in addition, a prominent Slavonic component) share some phonological features, but each nonetheless maintains a distinct phonological and morphological identity.

Coexisting Phonologies within Yiddish

Documented forms of Ashkenazic cannot, as a rule, have sounds not generally present in the coterritorial Yiddish (one possible exception being the ŋ reflex of historical ŋ in Netherlandic Ashkenazic, which may be a borrowing from local Sephardic usage; see Hirschel 1940: 455). In fact, the vowel inventory of each variety of Ashkenazic constitutes a subset (generally a large subset) of the inventory of the Semitic component of the local dialect of Yiddish. While Ashkenazic has not preserved ancient Semitic sounds, it has preserved phonological patterning that underwent change in Yiddish. Even in Yiddish, change never came close to levelling the phonologies of the two components of the language: they coexist and interact as subphonologies of the supersystem “Phonology of Yiddish.”

To cite one pervasive contrast, the Germanic component has root-bound stress and, consequently, fixed full and reduced vowels, e.g., Northeastern Yiddish leb “(I live),” lēbn “life,” lēbdik “lively,” lēbdikə “(pl.) lively,” lēbdikərējt “during his/her lifetime.” Even when the stem loses primary stress in deference to a stressed suffix (as in the last cited item), it retains stress and vowel color vis-à-vis the post-tonic vowel which remains both stressless and shewa-like in quality. Semitic component items, by contrast, exhibit penultimate stress. Suffixation results in shift of stress to the newly penultimate syllable and in the transformation of shewa to a full vowel, e.g., Northeastern Yiddish mēlbaï “garment,” pl. mēlbūšim. In other words, the synchronic underlying form of [mēlbaš] is in fact [malbaš]. Stress is boundary linked, as in classical Hebrew, although penultimate rather than ultimate (cf. Hebrew מֶלֶבָּשׁ, מֶלְבָּשׁוֹ, מֶלֶבָּשִים mēlbūš, mēlbaš, mēlbūšim).

Pan-Yiddish Vocalism

The system of Pan-Yiddish vocalism that follows is based on M. Weinreich’s (1960) but reduces his twenty correspondences to the sixteen that can be reconstructed from Yiddish per se, i.e., without reference to the stock languages (see Katz 1983b: 1021–24). Each correspondence represents a diaphoneme. The diaphoneme may
users' native language would be folly, firstly because it is spoken language that divulges the true phonology of a speaker, and secondly because, in the society in question, the links between the vernacular and the two sacred languages were profound for virtually the entire population (cf. M. Weinreich 1973: 1:251–320; 3:253–331). The most profound linguistic link is the cooccurrence, in different phonological guise, of thousands of items from the sacred languages in the vernacular.

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**Coexisting Phonologies within Yiddish**

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**Pan-Yiddish Vocalism**

The system of Pan-Yiddish vocalism that follows is based on M. Weinreich's (1960) but reduces his twenty correspondences to the sixteen that can be reconstructed from Yiddish per se, i.e., without reference to the stock languages (see Katz 1983b: 1021–24). Each correspondence represents a diaphoneme. The diaphoneme may
Table 4.1. Diaphonic Systematization of Pan-Yiddish Vocalism  
GC = Germanic Component; SC = Semitic Component

Series 1 (originally short):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel 11:</th>
<th>Pan-Yiddish a (but SEY o ~ a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GC: gas “street,” hant “hand,”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vant “wall”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC: activa “certainly,” dafna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“as a matter of fact,” prati</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“detail”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel 21:</th>
<th>Pan-Yiddish e</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GC: besor “better,” help “help,”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ven “when”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC: efso “maybe,” emas “true,”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sed “ghost”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel 31:</th>
<th>Pan-Yiddish i (but e in some NWY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GC: fis “fish,” nidrik “low,”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zilhar “silver”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC: bris “circumcision,” inken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“matter,” skor “drunk”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel 41:</th>
<th>Pan-Yiddish o</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GC: got “God,” lax “hole,” vaq</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“week”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Vowel 51:                        | NWY o || MWY, SWY, NEY, STY u || MEY, SEY i |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| GC: frum “religious” [Jewish],   |                               |
| h anti “dog,” kumon “come”      |                               |
| SC: guzmo “exaggeration,” stus “nonsense,” xupa “wedding canopy” | |

Series 2 (originally long):

| Vowel 12:                        | NWY o / u || SWY o / ou || NEY, STY o || MEY, SEY u ~ u |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| GC: hsor “blow,” naddrl “needle,” |                               |
| xof “sleep”                      |                               |
| SC: lowsha “moon,” mispoxa “family,” | xolm “dream”               |

| Vowel 22:                        | NWY ej || MWY ej || SWY ej || NEY, STY ej || MEY aj || SEY ej |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| GC: hej “angry,” lezh “lion,”    |                               |
| shein “beautiful”                |                               |
| SC: brejra “choice,” maxaxesja “witch,” | sezela “common sense” |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel 32:</th>
<th>Pan-Yiddish i (but isochronic NEY, STY i)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GC: breg “letter,” grin “green,”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>styal “boots”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC: mevinas “expertise,” navim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“prophets,” tfisa “jail”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Vowel 42:                        | NWY ou || MWY i || SWY ou || NEY ej || MEY, SEY, STY ej |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| GC: breg “bread,” grois “large,” |                               |
| vojmon “live [= “dwell”]”        |                               |
| SC: gjas “golem,” sqi “fool,”    |                               |
| xjdas “month”                    |                               |

| Vowel 52:                        | NWY, MWY, SWY le || NEY, STY e || MEY, SEY i |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| GC: bux “book,” fus “foot,”      |                               |
| sul “synagogue”                  |                               |
| SC: bso “virgin,” malbushim “clothing,” | rajus “remedy”     |
Series 3 (series 1 vowels subject to early lengthening):

Vowel 13:
NWY ə || MWY, SWY a || NEY, StY ŋ || MEY, SEY ŋ ~ ū
GC: əroz “grass,” nəmon “name,” tag “day”

Vowel 25:
NWY e || MWY i || SWY ŋ || NEY, StY e || MEY ej || SEY ej (older i/i)
GC: bētn “request,” lēbedik “lively,” štetl “village”
SC: régo “minute,” tēvo “habit,” xēsad “act of kindness”

Series 4 (original diphthong):

Vowel 24:
NWY, MWY, SWY ŋ || NEY, StY ej || MEY aj || SEY ej
GC: glnj “I believe,” klējd “dress,” zējgar “clock”

Vowel 34:
NWY ej || MWY, SWY aj || NEY, StY aj || MEY ā || SEY a
GC: bašājmerlax “obvious,” lājflx “sheet,” vājs “white”

Vowel 44:
NWY, MWY, SWY ə || NEY, StY ej || MEY, SEY, StY əj
GC: bojm “tree,” əjg “eye,” tajb “deaf”

Vowel 54:
NWY, MWY, SWY ou || NEY, StY aj || MEY ōu, ō || SEY ou/ů
GC: hojz “house,” moj “mound,” toj “pigeon,” “dove”

Construction of Synchronic Systems

Systematization of these geographically differentiated reflexes of common historic sources allows for the construction of a synchronic system for a given variety. Thus, the system may be used to construct the actual stressed vocalism of Northeastern Yiddish, which is illustrated in Table 4.2, and to compare it with that of MidEastern Yiddish (Table 4.3) or Northwestern Yiddish (Table 4.4), a variety no longer spoken. Where possible, a sample word is provided from the Semitic component. Where the vowel is limited to the Germanic component, the sample is drawn from that component. Glosses are provided at the relevant point in Table 4.1.

Table 4.2. Stressed Vowel System of Northeastern Yiddish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel</th>
<th>Word 1</th>
<th>Word 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i₁₁/33 (šíkar, tʃiʃə)</td>
<td>u₁₁/32 (gůźma, bůšla)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ej₂₂/24/42/44 (brějə, glejbj, gějlan, bojm)</td>
<td>əj₃₄ (hojz)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e₂₁/25 (ěfšər, régo)</td>
<td>a₁₂/13/41 (lavəna, nəmən, xǐxma)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a₁₃ (lɑyʃləx)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a₁₁ (avūdə)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Series 3 (series I vowels subject to early lengthening):

Vowel 13:
NWY ə || MWY, SWY ə || NEY, Sź Y o || MEY, SEY ə ~ u

GC: grox “grass,” nómam “name,” tog “day”

Vowel 25:
NWY e || MWY i || SWY e || NEY, Sź Y e || MEY ej || SEY ej (older t/i)

GC: bém “request,” lébédik “lively,” ščet “village”

SC: régo “minute,” téva “habit,” xésed “act of kindness”

Series 4 (original diphthong):

Vowel 24:
NWY, MWY, SWY ə || NEY, Sź Y ej || MEY aj || SEY ej

GC: gleib “(I) believe,” klejd “dress,” zégør “clock”

Vowel 34:
NWY ej || MWY, SWY aj || NEY, Sź Y aj || MEY ə || SEY a

GC: bašájmperlax “obvious,” lájlax “sheet,” vajs “white”

Vowel 44:
NWY, MWY, SWY ə || NEY, Sź Y ej || MEY, SEY, Sź Y aj

GC: bojm “tree,” ojg “eye,” tojg “deaf”

Vowel 54:
NWY, MWY, SWY ə || NEY, Sź Y oj || MEY əu, ə || SEY ou/u

GC: hojz “house,” mazl “mouth,” toj “pigeon,” “dove”

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Systematization of these geographically differentiated reflexes of common historic sources allows for the construction of a synchronic system for a given variety. Thus, the system may be used to construct the actual stressed vocalism of Northeastern Yiddish, which is illustrated in Table 4.2, and to compare it with that of Midwestern Yiddish (Table 4.3) or Northwestern Yiddish (Table 4.4), a variety no longer spoken. Where possible, a sample word is provided from the Semitic component. Where the vowel is limited to the Germanic component, the sample is drawn from that component. Glosses are provided at the relevant point in Table 4.1.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phonetic</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i1/s3  (šikar, tfisn)</td>
<td>u5/1s2 (gúznio, bsúlo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e/j2/424/24a/4a (brejro, gleib, gáflam, bojm)</td>
<td>oj3/4 (hojz)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e/s1/25 (šesar, régo)</td>
<td>aj3 (lájlax)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aj4 (lájlax)</td>
<td>a1 (aváda)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3 Stressed Vowel System of MidEastern Yiddish

| $\tilde{i}_{32}$ (tfša, břša) | $u_{12/13}$ (ləwʊnə, nəmən) |
| $i_{31/31}$ (sūkər, gízmo) | $\check{e}_{25}$ (pré̆ga) |
| $\check{e}_{24}$ (řé̆ga) | $\check{e}_{21}$ (řfšor) |
| $\check{a}_{34}$ (brä̆rə, glajn) | $\check{a}_{34}$ (lāłax) |
| $\check{a}_{11}$ (avádzə) |

Origins of the Vowel System of the Semitic Component in Yiddish

Sources of the Semitic Component’s Vowel System

The vowel system of the Semitic component in Yiddish derives directly from a Northwest Semitic vowel system akin to that known as “Tiberian.” Tiberian is a highly sophisticated system of diacritic marks (comprising vowel signs and stress marks), codified on the western shores of Lake Tiberias (the Sea of Galilee) in the late first millennium CE. Both the Tiberian system and its specific phonological version of the text of the Hebrew Bible have been standard for many centuries. There are two principal phonological interpretations of the system. One postulates seven vowel qualities (i, e, e, a, o, u, u). Another, formulated by the Kimchis, a prominent family of philologists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, posits a ten-vowel system comprising five tense vowels distinguished from five lax vowels (see M. Kimchi [1509–1518]: [11]; D. Kimchi 1545: 48). The graphemic system can be constructed to support either, but metrical evidence supports the Kimchis (see Ben-David 1958). The Semitic component in Yiddish unambiguously derives from a Kimchian-like system comprising ten proto-vowels. Arguments that have been put forward linking Yiddish to another system, the five-vowel Palestinian system, are unsustainable (see Katz 1977; 1979; §§10–14; 1982: §9; 1987a: 50–57).

In Table 4.5, Tiberian graphemes are confronted with their cognates in the Pan-Yiddish system, yielding the following basic correspondences. Yiddish samples are

Table 4.4. Stressed Vowel System of Northwestern Yiddish

| $i_{32}$ (tfša) | $\tilde{u}_{32}$ (bəsūla) |
| $i_{31}$ (sūkər) | $\check{u}_{32}$ (gúzmo) |
| $\check{e}_{25}$ (řĕga) | $\check{u}_{12/13}$ (ləwʊnə, nəmən) |
| $\check{e}_{32/34}$ (brě̆rə, lé̆jliš) | $\check{a}_{34}$ (gulonə, hówə) |
| $\check{e}_{21}$ (řfšor) | $\check{a}_{34}$ (xšĭna) |
| $\check{a}_{34/44}$ (glap, bant) |
| $\check{a}_{34}$ (avádzə) |
### Table 4.5. Yiddish Cognates of Tiberian Vowels

#### Series 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel 11</th>
<th>NEY</th>
<th>MEY</th>
<th>NWY</th>
<th>gloss</th>
<th>Tiberian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) closed syllabic pathah:</td>
<td>cad</td>
<td>cad</td>
<td>cad</td>
<td>&quot;side (of family or dispute)&quot;</td>
<td>דעם [sød]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) originally closed syllabic pathah:</td>
<td>קאה</td>
<td>קאה</td>
<td>קאה</td>
<td>&quot;bride&quot;</td>
<td>הַלּוּ [kalló]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) hatef patah:</td>
<td>קאזר</td>
<td>קאזר</td>
<td>קאזר</td>
<td>&quot;pig&quot;</td>
<td>דָה [házir]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) closed syllabic qames:</td>
<td>רַמ</td>
<td>רַמ</td>
<td>רַמ</td>
<td>&quot;sea&quot;</td>
<td>ז [jim]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel 21</th>
<th>NEY</th>
<th>MEY</th>
<th>NWY</th>
<th>gloss</th>
<th>Tiberian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) closed syllabic segol:</td>
<td>יסַר</td>
<td>יסַר</td>
<td>יסַר</td>
<td>&quot;Esther&quot;</td>
<td>אנש [anš]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) originally closed syllabic segol:</td>
<td>יטְס</td>
<td>יטְס</td>
<td>יטְס</td>
<td>&quot;legal permission&quot;</td>
<td>רְטָז [rettér]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) hatef segol:</td>
<td>יָסָס</td>
<td>יָסָס</td>
<td>יָסָס</td>
<td>&quot;true&quot;</td>
<td>דָש [ðemš]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) closed syllabic šere:</td>
<td>יָס</td>
<td>יָס</td>
<td>יָס</td>
<td>&quot;ghost&quot;</td>
<td>דָס [ðés]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel 31</th>
<th>NEY</th>
<th>MEY</th>
<th>NWY</th>
<th>gloss</th>
<th>Tiberian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) unstressed closed syllabic hireq:</td>
<td>מידгор</td>
<td>מידגור</td>
<td>מידגור</td>
<td>&quot;desert&quot;</td>
<td>מְדָבֶר [miðbär]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) originally unstressed closed syllabic hireq:</td>
<td>הִיָדָש</td>
<td>הִיָדָש</td>
<td>הִיָדָש</td>
<td>&quot;surprise&quot;</td>
<td>הִידָש [hiddás]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) stressed closed syllabic (long) hireq</td>
<td>דִינ</td>
<td>דִינ</td>
<td>דִינ</td>
<td>&quot;law&quot;</td>
<td>דִינ [din]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel 41</th>
<th>NEY</th>
<th>MEY</th>
<th>NWY</th>
<th>gloss</th>
<th>Tiberian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) unstressed closed syllabic qames (qames qatan):</td>
<td>קרבן</td>
<td>קרבן</td>
<td>קרבן</td>
<td>&quot;sacrihce&quot;</td>
<td>קְרָבָן [qebbón]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) closed syllabic holem:</td>
<td>סָד</td>
<td>סָד</td>
<td>סָד</td>
<td>&quot;secret&quot;</td>
<td>ד [sød]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel 51</th>
<th>NEY</th>
<th>MEY</th>
<th>NWY</th>
<th>gloss</th>
<th>Tiberian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) unstressed closed syllabic qibbuś:</td>
<td>קְוצָר</td>
<td>קְוצָר</td>
<td>קְוצָר</td>
<td>&quot;chutzpah&quot;</td>
<td>קוסָר [kusó]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b) originally unstressed closed syllabic qibbus: šítot šítot šótot “partner” נַשְׁתָּה \([шу́та́])
c) closed syllabic shureq: zkus zxis zoxós “merit” תועב \([צוקוס])

Series 2:

Vowel 12
NEY MEY NWY gloss Tiberian
a) open syllabic qames:
lovóna lavûna lovóna “moon” חָבָן \([לווֹנָס])

Vowel 22
NEY MEY NWY gloss Tiberian
a) open syllabic shureq:
xéjalak xájalak xéjalak “part” מָלַק \([הלֶק])

Vowel 32
NEY MEY NWY gloss Tiberian
a) open syllabic hireq:
šxito šxito šxité “slaughter” מִשְׁרַה \([שֻׁרָה])

Vowel 42
NEY MEY NWY gloss Tiberian
a) open syllabic holem:
séjdas sájdas súdes “secrets” מָזוּה \([סֹדֶה])

Vowel 52
NEY MEY NWY gloss Tiberian
a) open syllabic shureq:
búša búša “shame” חָבָה \([בֻּשָּה])

Series 3:

Vowel 13b
NEY MEY NWY gloss Tiberian
a) stressed open syllabic pathah:
páxat páxet páxat “fear” הָאָב \([פָּבָד])

Vowel 25
NEY MEY NWY gloss Tiberian
a) stressed open syllabic segol:
régo régo régo “moment” מַעַן \([רְוָאָף])

provided in Northeastern Yiddish (NEY) and Mideastern Yiddish (MEY), the two modern dialects that collectively provide a maximal set of oppositions, as well as Northwestern Yiddish (NWY), to represent the former dialects of the West. Transcriptions of Tiberian follow each example, using the following equivalents: qames (,) = ə; shere (.) = ɛ; long hireq (') = ɨ; holem (1), (.) = ə; (long) shureq (1) =
ע; pathah (א) = α; segol (א) = ε; short šireq (ש) = i; unstressed closed syllabic qames (qames qatan) (כ) = k; (short) qibbuṣ (ך) = u; ḥatif pathah (ך) = i; ḥatif segol (ך) = c; ḥatif qames (ך) = ɔ; mobile shewa (ך) = a. Glosses provide usage in Yiddish.

Primary and Secondary Fusion

“Primary Fusion” is the fusion between the Semitic and Germanic components of Yiddish immediately upon the settlement in Germanic-speaking lands of the Jews who were, retrospectively taken, the first Ashkenazim. This primary fusion encompassed the ten vowels of series 1 and 2. Each of these ten Yiddish protovowels came into existence by way of the fusion of a given Semitic with a given Germanic vowel into a unitary new Yiddish vowel.

“Secondary Fusion,” on the other hand, refers to joinings of Germanic and Semitic some time during the history of Yiddish. Consonantal loss and its phonetic effects are a prime catalyst of secondary fusion. Loss of ?(n) and ð(ŋ), for example, gave rise to hiatus which was variously resolved (cf. below). The hiatus merged with vowel 34 in Eastern Yiddish, e.g., NEY dągo “worry,” tąnero “complaint” || MEY dągô, tāno || SEY dągo, tāno (cf. Tiberian נְֵגֶו do?ר, תָּנֶו ta?ר). Thus, from the viewpoint of Eastern Yiddish alone (and some parts of Western Yiddish), Semitic component 34 could be added to vowel 34 (see Table 4.1, Series 4). In other parts of Western Yiddish, however, hiatus gives ą, part of the local realization of merged 24/44 (in Southern Western Yiddish 13/24/44).

Finally, there are isolated cases where a Semitic component form has “gone astray” into a usually strictly Germanic vowel, e.g., (some) Mideastern Yiddish gō, gow “gentile” with vowel 54, for expected ą, “Christian” (cf. Tiberian ס גוא). The diphthong in the Hebrew-derived word fused in the dialect with the local realization of 54, apparently at a point in time when local 54 was /ą/. The conspicuous rarity of such exceptions serves to highlight the remarkable overall consistency in the Yiddish realizations through time and space, clearly pointing toward the derivation of Yiddish, and its Semitic component, from a protolanguage formed when primary fusion transpired (see Katz 1970; 1988c).

The Distinct Phonology of Ashkenazic

The Notion “Formal Ashkenazic”

Contrary to much popular belief, the sound patterns of Ashkenazic are not those of Yiddish. Every traditional Ashkenazi commands two distinct Semitic phonologies, one for the Semitic component in his or her Yiddish, the other for Ashkenazic. There is, moreover, a sociolinguistically determined continuum between the fixed pole of Yiddish, and the variable pole of Ashkenazic: from its most formal through a range of varieties ultimately approaching Yiddish. These varieties of Ashkenazic are discussed below. The forms cited for purposes of illustration will reflect “Formal Ashkenazic,” the variety used, for instance, in reading from the Torah. This variety is chosen for examples cited because it provides an opposing conceptual pole to the
phonology of Yiddish, facilitating comparison between two maximally different objects. That is not to gainsay the far more widespread usage of “Popular Ashkenazic”. In some instances, penultimately stressed Popular Ashkenazic variants are provided alongside their Formal counterparts.

**Major Differences between Ashkenazic and Yiddish**

Ashkenazic is phonologically distinguished from the Semitic component of Yiddish in two fundamental ways, one prehistoric (from the viewpoint of Ashkenaz), the other historic. Prehistorically, the Hebrew and Aramaic pronunciation that became Ashkenazic was never processed by an across-the-board rule of Closed Syllable Shortening (or “Laxing”) which did process the Hebrew and Aramaic that became the Semitic component in Yiddish. In the Semitic component, Closed Syllable Shortening results in the systematic morphophonemic alternations 22 (proto \( *\theta \) \( \sim \) 21 (\( *\varepsilon \)); 12 (\( *\alpha \) \( \sim \) 11 (\( *\alpha \)); and 42 (\( *\theta \) \( \sim \) 41 (\( *\varepsilon \)). In each of the alternations the syllable boundary is the conditioning factor: closed syllables trigger Shortening. Hence the Tiberian pairs בֵּית → בָּית “ghosts,” אָב → אָב “father,” קָלַל → קָלַל “rules,” קָלוֹנִים → קָלוֹנִים “general rule,” “generality”; סֵפֶר → סֵפֶר “scribe,” pl. סֵפֶרִים → סֵפֶרִים “scribes,” each of which has identical vowels, give Semitic component alternating pairs, e.g., Northeastern Yiddish בֵּית (22) \( \sim \) בָּית (21); קָלוֹנִים (12) \( \sim \) קָלוֹל (11); סֵפֶר (42) \( \sim \) סֵפֶרִים (41); Mideastern Yiddish בֵּית (22) \( \sim \) בָּית (21); קָלוֹנִים (12) \( \sim \) קָלוֹל (11); סֵפֶר (42) \( \sim \) סֵפֶרִים (41). Note that in cases such as classical סֵפֶרִים, syllabification was obviously סֵפֶרִים, with no mobile shewa, at the point in history when Shortening occurred.

Dialects preserving length distinctions among the high vowels also alternate 32 \( \sim \) 31 and 52 \( \sim \) 51, or preserve vestiges of these alternations, e.g., (some) Mideastern Yiddish דִּינוֹם (32) “laws” \( \sim \) דִּין (31), בִּגְופָּה (52) “itself” \( \sim \) בִּגְופ (51) “body.” Cf. Tiberian cognates בִּדּוֹת דִּינוֹם, s.g. בִּדּוֹת דִּין; בִּגְופָּה בִּגְופ; בִּגְופ (51) “body.”

The Ashkenazic of each area, however, preserves long vowels in closed syllables as in open ones, except in the case of vowel 12, where Ashkenazic too shortens in closed syllables, not to 11 (\( *\alpha \)) as in Yiddish, but to 41 (\( *\varepsilon \)). This Ashkenazic alternation is obscured in Northeastern Ashkenazic where 11 and 41 are merged (as unitary \( \alpha \)), but evident in other dialects. Classical בֵּית בֵּית “man,” “human,” for example, turns up as Mideastern and Southeastern Ashkenazic בֵּית / בֵּית and Western Ashkenazic בֵּית / בֵּית. The two Mideastern Ashkenazic types of qames are distinguished in modern Hasidic alphabet primers by explicit exercises (e.g., Birnha 1976: 95; Fried 1983: 141–42; cf. below).

Table 4.6 contrasts Semitic component alternation with Ashkenazic nonalternation (differing alternation in the case of qames) for the three pairs of vowels which consistently alternate in all varieties of Yiddish. The contrasts are illustrated in Northeastern, Mideastern, and Northwestern Ashkenazic. Stress is left unmarked in Ashkenazic forms to allow for both more formal variants (with ultimate stress) and less formal variants (with penultimate stress).

The second series of differences between the Semitic component in Yiddish and Ashkenazic results from the resistance of Formal Ashkenazic to some of the phonological changes that have transpired during the history of Yiddish, most promi-
nently Stress Shift (to penultimate accentuation) and Posttonic Reduction (reduction of full vowels to a unitary shewa-like vowel after word-stress). The contrast is illustrated in Table 4.7 for the same three dialects. The three sample items are, in Tiberian, גָּן גָּנָּן "thief," יִשְׂרָאֵל "Israel," נֶשֶׁר "bride."

Closed Syllable Shortening, Stress Shift, and Posttonic Reduction all conspire to make for numerous differences in the phonological representations of historically identical lexical items. The correspondences characterizing the Yiddish-Ashkenazic phonological relationship are illustrated in Table 4.8. Oppositions levelled in Yiddish by Closed Syllable Shortening are preserved in Ashkenazic. Stress Shift results in Tiberian pretonic vowels bearing word stress, while Posttonic Reduction

### Table 4.6. Alternation in Yiddish vs No (or other) and Ashkenazic Alternation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northeastern Yiddish</th>
<th>Northeastern Ashkenazic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>שֶׁדִּים ~ שֶׁד</td>
<td>שֶׁדִּים, שֶׁד</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>קָלוֹל ~ קַל</td>
<td>קָלוֹל, k(א)ל</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אֶּלֶּף ~ אֶלֶּף</td>
<td>שֶׁפֶלֶּף, sp(א)ל</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.7. Yiddish Stress Shift and Posttonic Reduction vs Unshifted, Unreduced Ashkenazic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northeastern Yiddish</th>
<th>Northeastern Ashkenazic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>גָּנֶה</td>
<td>גָּנָּן</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יִשְׂרַאֵל</td>
<td>יִשְׂרָאֵל</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>קָלוֹ</td>
<td>קָלוֹ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MidEastern Yiddish</th>
<th>MidEastern Ashkenazic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>גָּנֶה</td>
<td>גָּנָּן</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יִשְׂרַאֵל</td>
<td>יִשְׂרָאֵל</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>קָלוֹ</td>
<td>קָלוֹ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northwestern Yiddish</th>
<th>Northwestern Ashkenazic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>גָּנֶה</td>
<td>גָּנָּן</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>יִשְׂרַאֵל</td>
<td>יִשְׂרָאֵל</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>קָלוֹ</td>
<td>קָלוֹ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiddish</td>
<td>Ashkenazic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEY: sam “poison,” jam “ocean”</td>
<td>sam, jem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEY: sam, jam</td>
<td>sam, jem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWY: sam, jam</td>
<td>sam, jem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>21, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEY: esor “maybe,” ger “proselyte”</td>
<td>esor, gejr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEY: esor, ger</td>
<td>esor, gejr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWY: esor, ger</td>
<td>esor, gejr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>41, 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEY: körəh “sacrifice,” sof “end”</td>
<td>korban, soj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEY: körəh, sof</td>
<td>korban, soj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWY: korban, sof</td>
<td>korban, soj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>γ</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEY: kárlas “celery [at Passover]”</td>
<td>karpas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEY: kárlas</td>
<td>karpas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWY: kárlas</td>
<td>karpas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEY: xejse “darkness”</td>
<td>xesex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEY: xejse</td>
<td>xesex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWY: xesex</td>
<td>xesex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ε</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEY: jájın “(ritual) wine”</td>
<td>jajin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEY: jajin</td>
<td>jajin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWY: jajin</td>
<td>jajin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ο</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEY: bátton “lazy fellow”</td>
<td>batlôn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEY: batlôn</td>
<td>batlôn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWY: batlôn</td>
<td>batlôn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>θ</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEY haloxə “Jewish law”</td>
<td>haloxə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEY haloxe</td>
<td>haloxe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWY haloxe</td>
<td>haloxe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ι</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEY teyvas “(month of) Teveti”</td>
<td>teyvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEY tajvaz</td>
<td>tajvaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWY teyvas</td>
<td>teyvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>υ</td>
<td>32 (~ 31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEY joxid “individual”</td>
<td>joxid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEY juxci</td>
<td>juxci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWY joxet</td>
<td>joxid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ψ</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEY xalórm “dreams”</td>
<td>xalomzis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEY xalórm “dreams”</td>
<td>xalomzis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWY xalórm “dreams”</td>
<td>xalomzis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ω</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEY xosiv “important”</td>
<td>xosiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEY xosiv “important”</td>
<td>xosiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWY xosiv “important”</td>
<td>xosiv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
renders stressed Tiberian vowels both stressless and reduced. Yiddish shewa is therefore cognate with a whole range of full vowels in the Ashkenazic of the same speakers.

In the sample items provided in Table 4.8, stress is left unmarked in Ashkenazic forms to allow for comparison between Yiddish and various styles of Ashkenazic (see below). Thus, for example, in the final contrast cited, Northeastern Yiddish $o$ in $xosov$ is cognate with Northeastern Ashkenazic $u$ in $xosuv$, whether it is $xosuv$ (Formal Ashkenazic) or $xosov$ (Popular Ashkenazic). Items penultimately stressed in Tiberian retain penultimate stress in all forms of Yiddish and Ashkenazic.

**Resistance of Ashkenazic to Yiddish Sound Change**

*Sacred Language Resistance to Vernacular Sound Shift*

Speakers would not, a priori, in any given generation, hasten to incorporate in their sacred languages the latest vogue in pronunciation to take hold in the vernacular. There is potential in the evidence of sacred languages for better understanding the nature of sound shift in general. Is there a difference in principle, or a predictable difference, between "imperceptible gradual shift" and "abrupt shift"? One might perhaps predict that "low-level phonetic shift" would go unnoticed and permeate the sacred language, while higher level phonological shift not entailing "phonetic difficulty" in undoing a fait accompli sound shift would be more "resistible" in the sacred language. Alternatively, one might postulate a sociolinguistic condition: perhaps as long as a sound shift remains a variable, the population will shun it in the sacred language, but once the old form disappears, it is "goodbye Charlie" in the sacred language every bit as much as in the vernacular.

As in political history, it is often the case in the social history of language that one cannot necessarily predict what will become an issue and what won't. At the end of the day, it may boil down to the linguistic background and views of those in positions of authority and influence who make a fuss of some incorporations of sound shift into the sacred language, and let others go unnoticed. Moreover, scholars of a Dialect A which did not undergo a certain shift would be predisposed to object to incorporation of a Dialect B sound shift in the sacred language used even by Dialect B speakers. Ashkenazic studies can provide a wealth of material for students of theoretical linguistics and sociolinguistics.

**Final Devoicing**

Modern Standard Yiddish, following Northeastern and Southeastern usage, does not have the rule of Final Devoicing, but Mideastern Yiddish does, and all of Western Yiddish had it. Many modern Mideastern Yiddish speakers who have Final Devoicing in their Yiddish do not have it in their Ashkenazic, producing such pairs as Mideastern Yiddish $ku\breve{r}$ $o$ "relative (m.)," $min$ $ak$ "custom," $du\breve{w}$ $a$ "David," contrasting with Mideastern Ashkenazic $kuru\breve{y}v$ / $kuruv$ "close"; $minhu\breve{y}$ / $minho\breve{y}$; $du\breve{w}id$ / $du\breve{w}id$; (cf. Tiberian $ber$ $qur\breve{y}$, $muh$ $muh\breve{y}$, $du\breve{w}id$). Hebrew primers for Hasidic children have special exercises dedicated to the preservation of word final voicing distinctions (e.g. Fried 1983: 93–114).
The battle against Final Devoicing in Ashkenazic is at least seven hundred years old on the evidence of Yekusiel of Prague (whether he was indeed from Prague is not at all certain). Dated by Zunz (1845: 115) to the late thirteenth century and by Gumpertz (1957: 36–37) to the early part of that century, he is also known as Yah(a)bi (acronym of Yekusiel Hakoyheyn ben Yehud), Amongst Ashkenazim he was known as Zalmen Hanakdn “Zalmen the Vocalizer [i.e., expert on the Hebrew vowel pointing system]” (see Elye Bokker 1538: 77). Defending the phonological integrity of the reading of sacred Hebrew and Aramaic texts, Zalmen Hanakdn stormed against the word-final collapse of [d] and [t], and of [v] and [f] in Hebrew reading amongst the Ashkenazim, citing such minimal pairs as הָיְנָ ו “father (constr.)” הָיְנָ “also.” He complains of “people who ruin many words on account of the letters at their end, pronouncing them as other letters” (Yekusiel 1395: [189a]). (See Eldar in this volume.)

Fronting of the Old u Vowels

The Battle of Final Devoicing continues to be fought in the education of today’s Mideastern Yiddish speaking Hasidic schoolchildren. Other battles were fought by individuals but resolved by language history centuries ago. It is often acquiescence, not resistance, that has prevailed. A case in point is application of the fronting and unrounding of all old u vowels to i in Southern Eastern Yiddish (comprising Mideastern and Southeastern Yiddish), whereby ĭ) i and u > i, e.g., מָלֵס maliços ‘kingdom,” “country,” מָירָס mirəs ‘insolence,” “chutzpah.”

There is evidence that in older Yiddish, short u shifted before long ĭ at first to ĭ, before its unrounding to i which led to merger with old i. A large body of evidence was assembled by Birnbaum (1934). Christian Hebraists from Reuchlin onward sometimes distinguish ĭ = qibbuṣ from u = shureq, notwithstanding their overall predilection for Sephardic variants (e.g., Reuchlin 1506: 12, 14, 16, 19, 20).

Shabbet Sofer of Pshemishl (Shabbethai Sofer of Przemysl, ca. 1565–1635), a grammarian and specialist on Hebrew pointing, writing of Ashkenazic on Mideastern Yiddish territory, warned against pronouncing i for u (see Reif 1979: 37, 94). He is echoed by Yehiel-Mikl Efshetyn (d. 1706), well-known German rabbi, educationalist, and popular kabbalist, who warned against pronouncing qibbuṣ as hireq (i.e., as i), insisting that it be pronounced as shureq, in other words, that the classical u quality be preserved (Yehiel-Mikl Efshetyn 1697: 49a–49b; 1714: 20b–21a). In Yehiel-Mikl’s variety of Ashkenazic, historical short u had shifted to i, but historical long ĭ remained unshifted. It can be inferred that in seventeenth-century varieties of Ashkenazic known to these scholars, some people succeeded in blocking the application of vernacular sound shift to the sacred language.

Incidentally, these and other traditional Ashkenazic authors use the traditional Ashkenazic terms for these vowels: Ashkenazim’s shureq = qibbuṣ ⟨ę⟩ and Ashkenazim’s melupum ⟨ A Aramaic məlo pəm “full mouth”⟩ = shureq ⟨ę⟩. The pronunciation of the vowel names varies according to dialect, hence Northeastern śūrek, melipm, Mideastern śūrek, m(a)lipm, and so forth.

Among those on the other side of the debate was no less a figure than the Maharal of Prague (Yudo Leyb ben Betsalel ca. 1525–1609), known in folklore as the creator of the Golem. He went to great lengths to defend his ĭ pronunciation of
qibbut. The following is an excerpt from a discourse in which he invokes arguments from (a) proposed interrelationships between the shapes of the vowel graphemes and their phonetic realizations, (b) kabbalistic interpretations of the graphic shapes and their relative positions, and (c) the force of tradition and his belief in its sanctity.

I have seen people accuse the Ashkenazim of changing the vowel system—the vowels which are [symbolically] the People of Israel—... saying... that the shureq that is in the letter [ו] and the three dots [..] have a single reading, for they have so read in the works of the grammarians. And in order that the rest of the people who are not experts in the grammar of the language not fall into error and think this thing to be true and bring about the ruin of the language, a matter of great importance to Torah sages, I will here demonstrate with reliable evidence that the reading of the Ashkenazim is a proper reading. In fact, you will not find a true way other than the reading of the Ashkenazim. ...

They [the grammarians] wrote that the qibbut sefatayim (that we call shureq) [ו] and the shureq (that we call melupum) [ר] should be read identically, which the Ashkenazim do not do. ... Now according to the reading of the Ashkenazim, all the vowel signs have shapes demonstrating their vowel quality. ... [Here follows an explanation of the graphic shape of each vowel sign as an indication of the shape of the mouth when uttering the vowel it represents.] And so it is with the three dots ... and the dot in the letter וו. ... Here too we read each one according to what the vowel points show us: ... the three dots under each other [apparently his ע] because we extend the voice of three dots fully and it is like the extending of the three continuous dots: ... one dot in the letter [apparently his ע], according to which the extending ... is in the middle, not above nor below, but in the middle just as the dot is in the middle. But in qibbut sefatayim the extending of the voice is downward like the three dots which are extended from the top downward. And it is not possible for there to be three extended dots without a middle one which is always the essence of the vowel.

You may understand something great and wonderful, for no other vowel has what is in the shureq. For all the other vowels have their vowel point under the letter or upon the letter, but in the case of shureq a self-contained וו was established, and in it the shureq [ר]. This teaches us something vital on the seven vowels מ"הו כ of the pointing system, which reflects the movements מ"הו כ of the Seven Sides. For one vowel sign is always to one side: above, or below, or to the right, or to the left, or in front, or in back, or in the middle, and therefore they are seven vowels [here follows a discussion of the human qualities kabbalistically represented by each of the vowel signs and their positions] reflecting the Seven Voices at the Giving of the Torah, ... and the Middle was set apart unto itself, ... and because the shureq reflects the Middle, it was given a וו unto itself. ... From this alone you will understand the differentiation that exists between the shureq and the three dots מ"הו כ: “dots,” “points,” “the traditional vowel points”: that the shureq reflects the middle that is set apart unto itself, and it is the middle point that has no width or length at all, only a single point. Therefore the shureq was given one dot in a letter unto itself, reflecting the Middle which is a single point unto itself. But the three dots comprising the qibbut sefatayim reflect the Middle that is not a point alone, as it is impossible to create a middle without three, for the one that is between the other two is the middle. And the explanation is, that when three dots are placed in such a shape, extended diagonally as such, the middle dot has the judgment of the Middle that does not go out of the realm of balance and justice. For the upper one tends to the right and the
lower to the left and the middle one tends neither to right nor left, but stands in the middle and in the justice of the middle judgment, and is thereby set apart unto itself as is the case with every middle, but it is not totally set apart as is the dot in the vow [ע]. . . . Qibbus sefathayim reflects the movements [/vowels] of the Middle, but does not reflect the Middle that is set apart unto itself, for that which is set apart unto itself has greater virtue. But the qibbus sefathayim reflects the Middle that is not fully distinguished, and therefore no instance of these three dots has a vowel [letter] unto itself. . . . [Arguments are presented in favour of the Ashkenazic pronunciation of shewa as a, and against the a realization preferred by some Sephardi grammarians].

We have not come here to argue other than to maintain the reading that is in our hands from our forefathers of old, to not change, God forbid, anything in it, because of that which is found in the books of the later Sephardi grammarians, who are themselves not of one opinion. It is therefore incumbent upon us to stand for our tradition and our custom of old. For even if a wise man wrote in his work certain things, they did not come down to him by tradition, but according to his hypothesis (and Ibn Ezra [b. Tudela, Spain 1089, d. 1164] himself noted that these things did not come down to him via tradition), and how are his views contradicted by the custom in our hands and the tradition unto us from our forefathers. All the more so bearing in mind that we have explained that our custom has the appearance of wisdom and good taste and knowledge, and if we err, will not our forefathers intercede in our favour? And He, blessed be He, will place His Torah in our hearts to bestow upon us from His wisdom, Amen.

(Maharal of Prague 1599: 58b–59b)

The Maharal's defense of Ashkenazic qibbus was echoed by his contemporary, the talmudic luminary Mordekhay Yafe (Mordechai Jaffe), known as der Levush “the Levush” (ca. 1535–1612), who was, incidentally, a teacher of Shabbat Soyfer (who, as noted above, took the opposite theoretical viewpoint, albeit on the i rather than the ü realization of qibbus). The Levush starts off with the force of tradition, and proceeds to a structural linguistic argument drawing analogies from the qames (5) vs. pathah (a) and kere (historically e) vs. segol (e) oppositions which are distinguished qualitatively in Ashkenazic (e.g., Northeastern Mid eastern o vs. a, ej vs. e; Mideastern u/o vs. a, aj vs. e, Western o/o vs. a, ej vs. e). By way of analogy, he infers that the shureq vs. qibbus opposition must also be qualitative, presumably shureq = u (or ü) vs. qibbus = ü. He invokes the homiletic argument that the sacred and complete Torah could not be bereft of any vowel, and proceeds to offer phonological arguments derived from the graphemes of Tiberian Hebrew:

For I have seen recently that some people who consider themselves wise in their own eyes in the science of grammar have come forward to the point of leading astray some students, who err following them, and have made themselves like remnants of the generation of the Tower of Babel whose language was confounded, and they have invented and thought up a new language, and have gotten themselves and their students used to reading our vowel shureq (= qibbus, apparently his ü) exactly as we read the vowel melupum (= shureq, apparently his ü/ü), and they say that there is no difference between the vowel shureq and the vowel melupum except for shortening of the breath of the vowel: for the shureq short, and for melupum long, as in the case of our correct pronunciation of the vowel hireq without yud [ו] and hireq with yud [וי] which we correctly differentiate by shortening the breath for the one, and lengthening it for the other. And maybe they were confused because Rashi calls our
melupum “qibbus sefatayim,” and some grammarians call the shureq “qibbus sefatayim,” and therefore thought that they [they] are one vowel.

I have therefore decided to write somewhat at length to demonstrate the nonsense and the error of the people I referred to, and to demonstrate that we should not change the vowel which we have received from our forefathers on the grounds of “Forsake not the teaching of thy mother” [Prov. 1:8, 6:20].

And if they have fallen into this error because all agree that our shureq [= qibbus, ] is [phonologically] the short counterpart of the melupum [= shureq, ], which is a long vowel (like hireq without yud and hireq with yud, the one being called short, the other long, but alike in their vowel [quality], only one is short and one long; they therefore want to draw an analogy to the vowels shureq and melupum)—if this is their argument, they have no case, for if so, what will they do with pathah and qames, with segol and shere, being that the pathah is [phonologically] the short counterpart of the qames, and the segol is [phonologically] the short counterpart of the shere, even though their vowel [quality] does not match that of their long-vowel counterpart. So why should we not say this also in the case of shureq and melupum?

Moreover, I propose that from the viewpoint of common sense and a priori logic it is not possible for things to be so, for if, according to their view, the vowel of the melupum and the shureq are identical and there is no difference between them other than in the length of the breath, if that were the case, one vowel that is within the power of human speech would be missing in the vowel system of the Torah, and that is the vowel which we read for our shureq [presumably š]. Heaven forfend that the complete Torah which was given to us to complete within ourselves wholeness in all human knowledge, physical and logical, should lack a vowel that is present and very common in the pronunciation of humans, and that there should not be found one word to be read with that vowel! That is nothing but nonsense and foolishness, for of course all the vowels that a human can with his palate emit from his lips in his pronunciation are included, and especially this vowel, with which we pronounce our shureq, which is common among all and extremely frequent in the pronunciation of most speakers, and how could it be lacking. God forbid, in the vowels of the Torah.

One cannot claim an inconsistency in my view on the grounds that if I am right then their [i.e., the grammarians’ Sepharidi] pronunciation of shureq would be missing from the Torah, for you would be pointing out an inconsistency in your own position, bearing in mind that the vowels qames and shere are called “great vowels” [נָשָׁם נַשָּׁם], which are long in the breath. Why were signs not also devised for when one wishes to shorten the breath, as was done in the case of hireq without yud and hireq with yud? To the contrary, you must concede that the tradition came down to the Pointers [i.e., the Masoretes] who were masters of pure language, that in the case of the “great vowels” even if one wants to shorten them one cannot by nature do so to any great extent, to the point that whoever would try to shorten them greatly would have to lengthen them somewhat to spirantize a following begedkafet consonant [b, g, d, k, p, t] spirantize to v, y, d, x, f, ð in Hebrew and Aramaic via postvocalic spirantization; in Tiberian, short unstressed vowels occur in closed syllables, hence after a short vowel, begedkafet geminate stops occur (spirants do not geminate). Cf., e.g., jaf [ɓafas] “dry land” vs. jaf [ɓafás] “dry.” The Levush is arguing that qames and shere are phonologically long/tense vowels that cannot be “shortened” to make a short vowel. Moreover, a shewa that follows [qames or shere] is mobile shewa [because a long unstressed vowel always occurs in an open syllable; hence if the next vowel is shewa, it is a mobile shewa initiating the syllable thereafter; thus, e.g., (ןבּ) is kṣ[θw] [w]. Moreover, even there we find that special signs were made [which bear upon vowel length], the mappiq, and the mafṣiq and the deḥiq and sē merahiq.
This being the case, we may here too also in the case of melupum [= shureq: ı] discern the reason why there is no diacritic to incite shortening of the vowel, because it is like the qames and the sere, and unlike the vowel hireq which by nature can be shortened greatly, in view of which a special mark was designed to differentiate the short from the long, i.e., the yud [ı]. This seems to me obviously to refute the views of those who are in error, and [confirm] that we should introduce no change in the vowel shureq [= qibbus: ı]. And, for sake not the teaching of thy mother.

(Levush 1603: 49b)

It is significant that both the Maharal and the Levush offer intellectual defenses for the retention of ü in Ashkenazic. It is equally significant that neither relies on this defense alone. Both bring to bear the argument of tradition. The polemic tone is indicative of the passions raised by disputes on the pronunciation of Ashkenazic. Shabse Soyfer and Yekhiel-Mikhl Epshteyn have as their ideal a “correct” Ashkenazic which preserves the historical [u] quality of qibbus and must not be overrun by the u > ü, or u > i shift common to some Yiddish dialects.

Looking back, it is obvious that the Maharal’s and the Levush’s views were in concord with the course of history. Modern Mideastern and Southeastern Ashkenazic users have i quality realizations in regard to both qibbus and shureq. Older ü (from original u) was unrounded to i. It was never unrounded back to u. To the contrary, it dragged long ü, which was fronted to *ă, then to è. The two ensuing vowels are no longer phonemically opposed in many forms of Mideastern and Southeastern Ashkenazic (see below).

There are, however, attestations of “dipping into history” or dipping into other dialects in certain circumstances, and preserving an u quality. One informant, from a village in Romania (Southeastern Yiddish territory), recalls that shureq was consistently i in his Ashkenazic, with the exception of the word מְרַּאָה (me’arāh) which was read רַאָאָה (ra’āa) in the Bible to avoid the sacrilege of uttering רָאָא (raa) in that hallowed context. In the coterritorial Yiddish, רָאָא is a curse word, e.g., a רָאָא בְּזַיִן טָאָט “Damn his father” — "Damn him."

In fact, this i vowel, like the other vowels of Mideastern Ashkenazic, is for its users a symbol of authenticity and religiosity which proudly sets them aside from modernized and Northeaternized forms of Ashkenazic as well as from Israeli Hebrew. And thus it transpires, as so often in the history of language and culture, that a feature that once symbolized radical “incorrect” usage becomes the banner of “classic” language for a future generation.

One large question looms here for Western Yiddish studies. In view of all of Birnbaum’s (1934) philological evidence pointing to üqibbus in older Western Yiddish, how is it that attestations from the eighteenth century onward generally have u in the West? Could it be that Ashkenazic Resistance prevailed in the West? This calls for a monograph.

**Ashkenazic Sound Shift Lag**

Looking at twentieth-century relationships between Yiddish and Ashkenazic recoverable from native informants, it is obvious that those dialectal features of Yiddish that are most stigmatized are most likely to be kept out of Ashkenazic. One
case in point is the variety of Southeastern Yiddish popularly known as tša-mów lůṣh, after its rendition of standard tāta “father” and māmo “mother.” In linguistic terms, historical short a (vowel 11) merged with historical a in most environments (see Veyneg 1929: 133–35; U. Weinreich 1958: 225, 236). Southeasterners often report that the historical a quality was however retained in Ashkenazic, hence Southeastern Ashkenazic šābōs / šābō “Sabbath” vs. Southeastern Yiddish Šabōs (cf. Tiberian אָבָא šabbō).

There are other examples of “lag in progress” in the attempts of speakers to override their sound shifts. In sābāsdik ar lōṣh, a folkloristic name for Northeastern Yiddish, s is merged with š, and c (t) with č (see U. Weinreich 1952). There is evidence from some informants that sibilant merger was less prevalent in Ashkenazic than in Yiddish. Altbauer (1968: 455) notes that some Northeastern Ashkenazic users, who have ej₂j₂ in their Yiddish, preserve ej₂j₂ in their rendition of holom, thereby undoing the Northeastern merger of 42 and 22 in the sacred language (e.g., some Northeastern Yiddish tēyr “Torah” vs. Ashkenazic tōrō / tójro, cf. הָלָה tór). Bin-Nun (1973: 300) describes a variety of Siebenbürgen that has ej for šere in Ashkenazic, contrasting with the aj of the same speakers in Yiddish.

In each instance, the “stigmatized” feature is one rejected by Modern Standard Yiddish. Ashkenazic thereby provides valuable evidence for the societal forces at work in the rise of Standard Yiddish, before and wholly outside the compass of the secular Yiddish scholars who formalized the notion and the features of the standard language (cf. Kerler 1988). This is one of many potential services of Ashkenazic studies to Yiddish linguistics and to sociolinguistics generally.

It is possible, with caution, to extrapolate Ashkenazic lag into situations in the past where documentation may not be readily available. For example, in Northern Transitional Yiddish and in parts of northern Western Yiddish, initial s, for historical samekh (ס) and shin (ש), was affricitized to c (t), merging with the reflex of šade (tsadik), historical s (ס), giving e.g., Northern Transitional cājōr “(sacred) book” (Tiberian יִסֶּף sēfer (see Friedrich 1784: 39; Cohen 1923: 59; Katz 1988a: 50–51). Perhaps some speakers in the area would have had sajōr in their Ashkenazic contrasting with the cājōr of their Yiddish.

**Lexicalized Variants of Yiddish-Ashkenazic Cognates**

Phonologically differentiated reflexes of the same Hebrew or Aramaic etymon have often undergone centuries of divergent semantic development in Yiddish, contrasting with older meanings surviving in Ashkenazic. This results in such doublets as e.g., Northeastern Yiddish balehōs “boss,” vs. Ashkenazic bad habājīs “head of the household” (אֱלָה יְבָא bāal habājīj; nākējōv “woman of loose morals” vs. Ashkenazic nākējōv / nākējōv “female,” “feminine gender” (אֱלָה יְבָא nāqējōv; šs “letter [of the alphabet]” vs. ejō “heavenly omen” (אֱלָה יְבָא nāqējōv; vajzōs / vajzōs “name of one of Haman’s ten sons” (אֱלָה יְבָא nāqējōv; xadgādō “jail [humorous]” vs. xad gādō, xad gādō “name of the Passover song Chad gādō” (אֱלָה יְבָא nāqējōv; ‘ximō “sense of the joke” or “stupid idea passed off as a wise one” vs. ‘ximō / ‘ximō “wisdom” (אֱלָה יְבָא nāqējōv). In each pair cited, note that Yiddish forms can be useful for either the “Yiddish” or the “Ashkenazic”
meaning, while Ashkenazic forms are strictly limited to the Ashkenazic meaning—itself usually identical with the classic Hebrew or Aramaic gloss.

Ashkenazic as a Self-Contained Structure

Synchronic Structure

For the foregoing discussion, Ashkenazic has been viewed through the eyes of the Semitic Component in Yiddish, on the grounds of the primacy of native spoken language in phonological analysis. It is, however, equally important to view Ashkenazic as a synchronic linguistic structure capable of description, analysis, and reconstruction. Everybody learning Ashkenazic acquires the pronunciation via the study of the Tiberian system of vowel diacritics. These diacritics (called *naski* in Yiddish) are before the eyes of Ashkenazic users for an important part of their use of Ashkenazic (all of it for speakers whose Ashkenazic is limited to prayer and Pentateuch study, both of which entail "pointed texts," i.e., texts with the vowel diacritics included). A synchronic description of Ashkenazic may therefore include reference to the diacritics. The vowel system of each dialect of Ashkenazic may conveniently be mapped out using the Pan-Yiddish vowel correspondence (see above).

The stressed vowel system of present day Northeastern Ashkenazic comprises six phonemes, as illustrated in Table 4.9.

By contrast, the vowel system of Mideastern Ashkenazic, illustrated in Table 4.10, preserves more distinctions than any other modern form of Hebrew (Ashkenazic or non-Ashkenazic). It does not however preserve as many as the Semitic component of Mideastern Yiddish; in the Semitic component, the long vs. short reflexes of ḫireq and shureq are determined by Tiberian phonology. In many forms of Mideastern Ashkenazic the length differentiation seems on the whole to have been reinterpreted allophonically (long in stressed open syllables, short elsewhere), but this point requires further fieldwork. It is almost certain that ę and e are also complementary and therefore nonphonemic in Formal Ashkenazic. In popular varieties, application of posttonic reduction causes them to appear in the same environment (stressed open syllable), rendering them clearly phonemic, e.g., *xéj*ed “kindness” vs. *ęmes* “truth”; cf. formal *xéj*ed, *ęm*ēs (Tiberian ʾeṣed, ṣam ʾeṭē; cf. below). The theoretical question arises however of whether a nonvernacular language can have "allophones" that are unquestionably "phonemes" in the native language of its users. Are they real or the results of overstructuralism by the linguist? This question, posed by Ashkenazic studies, merits further research.

*Table 4.9. The Vowel System of Northeastern Ashkenazic*

| ı́hineq | ı́shureq/qibtsaq |
| ę́fereq/tolen | ę́shureq |
| ę́segol/hatef segol | ę́mex/hatef |
| ą́parah/hatef parah |
Table 4.10. The Vowel System of Mideastern Ashkenazic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ֵי (ה')</td>
<td>in stressed open syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ֵי</td>
<td>in closed syllables, unstressed open syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ֵי</td>
<td>in stressed open syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ֵי</td>
<td>in closed syllables/batef segol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ashkenazic Hebrew Education in Late Twentieth-Century Primary Schools

Children in Hasidic schools rooted in southern (i.e., non-Lithuanian) East European traditions around the world generally learn the Mideastern Ashkenazic system from the outset. In some schools, however, all segols are rendered ֵא when studying the vowel points, and the ֵא realization in stressed open syllables is “picked up” later in primary education, resulting in a child learning e.g., ֵאמְס and ֵאסֶד, modified at a later age to ֵאמָס vs. ֵאֶסֶד. Whether this is a symptom of declining use of ֵא for stressed open-syllabic segol in Hasidic communities needs to be researched. The two Mideastern Ashkenazic types of qames (ֵא / ֵא in open syllables, ֵא in closed syllables) are however distinguished in alphabet primers by explicit exercises (e.g., Birnhak 1976: 95; Fried 1983: 141–42).

Historical Phonology of Ashkenazic

Overview

The historical phonology of Ashkenazic is, in short, one of a Tiberian-like system that has undergone phonetic and phonological development over a millennium of European history. Its phonetic history generally follows closely upon that of co-territorial Yiddish dialects, but its phonological history is characterized by a substantial measure of independence resulting both from generation-to-generation language transmission (nonspoken living languages are transmitted this way too) and from the phonologically retentive power of the hallowed system of vocalization signs.

Consonantism

The consonantism of Ashkenazic is a much leaner system than its Tiberian antecedent. Consonants “not supported” by the indigenous central European phonetic scene, ָי (ך), ָי (י), ָי (י), ָי (י), ָי (י), ָי (י), ָי (י), and ָי (י), disappeared. Likewise, of the “begedkefer” spirants, arising from Northwest Semitic postvocalic spirantization (ָי > ָי > ָי, ָי > ָי, ָי > ָי, ָי > ָי, ָי > ָי), those without European counterparts—
γ, δ, and θ—also disappeared. Phonetic “disappearance” can have diverse structural implications. The following listing covers (a) loss, (b) merger, and (c) phononic shift retaining phonological distinctiveness. Within each category, the order follows the Jewish alphabet.

(a) Loss

κ [ʔ] zero, e.g., ἑλληνικὸν ἀμέν “amen” > Northeastern Ashkenazic (NEA) òmējn, Mid- eastern Ashkenazic (MEA) umājn, Western Ashkenazic (WA) òmējn.

Functionally consonantal ? was lost in all positions although [ʔ] does occur phonetically in various environments in Yiddish dialects. Traces of historical ? may be recovered from Yiddish (and cautiously extrapolated, with allowance for time lag, to Ashkenazic). Cf. e.g., Northeastern Yiddish sörn “enemies” ~ sg. sejnā, Mid- eastern sörn ~ sjejnō. The vocalic alternations in all dialects result from the application of Closed Syllable Shortening, demonstrating that aleph was consonantal (at the pre-Ashkenazic time of Shortening), i.e., *sörn | ūm | *sor | ūm via shortening (hypothetical sör | nīm would not have processed by Shortening). On the bearing of this evidence on mobile shewa, see below.

ג [g] zero, e.g., יִפְלָם יִפְלָם “world” > NEA eglam / ěglom, MEA eglam / ěglom, WA ọglam / ọglam.

Ayin too has left recoverable traces in Yiddish, which may bear on its presence in early Ashkenazic. Closed Syllable Shortening has processed the Biblical יָגֶל יָגֶל nēr wēnā “a fugitive and a wanderer” (Gen. 4:12, 14), giving Yiddish na vannād (zajn) “wander without a home,” where the a in na (יָגֶל nēr) betrays an erstwhile closed syllable (cf. vowel-final monosyllables, e.g., יִפְלָם יִפְלָם “comes” > NEA bā, MEA bu, WA bō etc; syllable-final (κ) and (γ) are not consonantal in Tiberian).

There are a number of issues on which the fates of ? and * are best treated together. Loss of both resulted in sequences of two successive vowels. In Yiddish, the ensuing hiatus fused with various Germanic component vowels (see above, where this instance is cited to illustrate secondary fusion): with vowel 34 in Eastern Yiddish (hence יָגֶל יָגֶל doṣgā) > Northeastern Yiddish dāgā “worry,” Mid- eastern dāgā). In some forms of Western Yiddish, merger occurred with Western Yiddish dā, the local realization of 24/44 or 13/24/44 (see Guggenheim-Grunenberg 1973: 40–43).

In Northeastern Yiddish, hiatus was resolved by yotization, e.g., שְׁוֵיָהוּ “(the holiday) Shavuoth” (Shōwād). These and other Yiddish reactions to hiatus are often absent in Ashkenazic where the two ensuing vowels in succession are simply read in sequence, e.g., Northeastern Ashkenazic dōgē / dōgē, shōvēs / shōvēs.

Yekusiel of Prague warns against such pronunciations as יָגֶל יָגֶל wēnār “and bitter” for יָגֶל יָגֶל wēnār “and he said,” quipping that such errors are רָאֵי רָאֵי ray wēnār hōtēnjād “evil and bitter in my eyes” (Yekusiel 1395: [186b]). He also bemoans failure to distinguish רָכָה רָכָה for “hide (n.)” from רָאֵי רָאֵי ray “light” (ibid. [189b]).
It is evident from Yekusiel’s samples that by the thirteenth century the old aleph (א) vs. ayin (א) distinction, and the aleph vs. zero and ayin vs. zero distinctions, were all in trouble.

(b) Merger with European-Compatible Consonants

1 [γ] merged with س [g], e.g., בֶּגֶל begel “calf” \ NEA āgel, MEA āgel, WA āgel.

ר [ð], merged with ר [d], e.g., רַדּ רד “yet” “more” \ NEA ejd, MEA ejd, WA ejd.

In names of letters of the Jewish alphabet there is the variant spellings (Jud) and (Jus) for מ, (Lamed) and (Lames) for ב. Cf. classical ב, ב. These forms are also attested in a twentieth-century variety of German in the village of Schopfloch which borrows heavily from Western Yiddish (see Philipp 1983: 43; Shy 1990: 346).

ר [w] merged with ר [v], e.g., ואנֵר wajnir “and he called” \ NEA wajkro / wajkre, MEA wajkrū / wajkru, WA wajkro / wajkre.

Yekusiel mourns the collapse of historical רַבָּר ʿrwī “his father” with רַבָּר ʿrwī “Spring” (Yekusiel 1395: 189a).

ר [h] merged with ר [x], e.g., רָיָן rāyān “wise man” \ NEA xaxām / xāxom, MEA xuxām / xīxom, WA xoxom / xoxom.


כ [t] merged with [t], e.g., יָכָל yacle “dew” \ Pan-Ashkenazic tāl.

Yekusiel decrees merger of רַבִּישׁ ʿayvū “his sojourn” and רַבִּישׁ ʿayvū “his staff,” “his tribe” (Yekusiel 1395: 189b).

פ [q] merged with פ [k], e.g., פֵּרָבָּר qarāb “sacred” \ NEA kōdejš / kōdejš, MEA kudōjš / kudōjš, WA kōdūajš / kōdūajš.

Yekusiel cites merger of פֵּרָבָּר qallā “easy (fem.)” with פֵּר ניל qallā “bride” (1395: 189b) as one of the evils resulting from failure to distinguish the two consonants.

ח [θ] merged with ח [s] (ח [s] was itself almost certainly merged with [s] long before the rise of Ashkenaz), e.g., חָיָה θaḥ “[particle preceding accusative definite noun]” \ Pan-Ashkenazic sx.

In the name of the fourth letter of the Jewish alphabet, ח, final ח appears as plosive צ (itself usually the reflex of ח [t] or כ [t]), or as [d], hence דָּלוֹד or דָּלוֹד in modern Ashkenazic. There is however evidence of older Western Yiddish צ. Bibliophilus (1742: 3) has (Dailes) alongside (Dales).

(c) Phonemic Preservation Via Phonetic Shift

ק [s] was affricated to [c] (צ'), leaving a distinct phoneme. Probably during the primary fusion characterizing the birth of Yiddish and Ashkenazic, the Semitic צ fused with medieval German (ts), producing the unitary Yiddish /c/ phoneme which
occurs in both components, producing such homonyms as \( kac \) = “cat” (cf. Middle High German \( kaiz\)) and “Katz” (cf. Hebrew \( p\)י). 

**Vowel System**

The vowel system of Ashkenazic derives straightforwardly from a system closely resembling a version of Tiberian vocalism. There are, however, differences: (1) in Proto-Ashkenazic, the three źat or ultrashort vowels (\( \circ \), \( \acute{a} \), \( \breve{a} \)) were not distinguished from their normal-length counterparts (\( \acute{e} \), \( \grave{a} \), \( \breve{a} \)), unstressed closed-syllabic \( \breve{a} \). Secondly, the variant imported to Ashkenaz apparently had short \( \circ \) (corresponding with Yiddish vowel 41) for qames in all closed syllables (not only in unstressed closed syllables, as per classical Hebrew grammar). The descriptive environment of that shortening rule includes as consonants \( j \) and \( n \) with mappiq (\( n \)), which traditional Hebrew grammarians consider to mark the exceptional consonantality of word-final \( n \). It is morphologized in third-person possessives ending in \( n \). The Proto-Ashkenazic qames shortening apparently inherited from the Near East was therefore of the type qames \( \rightarrow [\circ - long] / _{-}C \) (where \( _{-} = \) syllable boundary). The phonology of the language obviously treated \( j \) and \( H \) (where \( H = n \)) as consonantal.

The effects of this pre-Ashkenazic shortening are evident in modern dialects of Ashkenazic which distinguish vowel 12 (Proto-Ashkenazic \( ^*s \), corresponding with qames) from 41 (Proto-Ashkenazic \( ^*z \), corresponding with stressed open-syllabic qames and źat qames). Thus, for example, in modern Mideastern Ashkenazic, where open-syllabic qames is realized as \( u \) (often \( [\acute{u}] \) but there is no phonemic length opposition for this vowel, hence the unitary transcription \( u \)), closed-syllabic qames and qames before \( j \) and mappiq are realized as \( s \), e.g., \( pur\) “(Wilderness of) Paran” (\( \pi\)ר\( פ \)), \( biz\) “disgrace” (\( \pi\)י\( ב\)ז), \( t\) “her husband” (\( \pi\)ת\( ר\)ש\( ח \)). Mappiq often retain ultimate stress even in Popular Ashkenazic, accentuating such contrasts as \( \breve{s}\) “woman” vs. \( \breve{t}\) “her husband.”

**The Proto-Ashkenazic Vowel System**

The proposed system of Proto-Ashkenazic vocalism is illustrated in Table 4.11. Yiddish vowel numbers are added to denote the fusion with vernacular vowels which took place at the theoretical linguistic starting point of Ashkenaz.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.11. Proto-Ashkenazic Vocalism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( ^*a ) long, breve / 32</td>
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<tr>
<td>( ^*u ) long, breve / 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( ^*i ) short, breve / 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( ^*e ) breve / 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( ^*E ) open, breve / 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( ^*a ) open, breve / 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( ^*o ) open syllabic qames / 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( ^*e ) open syllabic qames, breve qames / 41</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**The Phonology of Ashkenazic**

71
Summary of Sound Changes

(1) Assorted Consonantal Shifts (See Above)

Loss of ? and ʕ; Merger of γ with g; θ with d; w with v; h with x; t with t; q with k; θ with s; shift of ɣ to c (t).

(2) Lengthening

Lengthening, inspired by the analogous German development, processed short vowels in stressed open syllables at an early point in the history of Ashkenaz. Only two Tiberian vowels met the structural description of the rule: pathah and segol in stressed open syllables, hence *xésed < *xésed “kindness, mercy,” páxad < *páxad “fear.” In terms of Pan-Yiddish vocalism, proto 21 (*e, e.g., *xésed, *emés “truth”) split into unlengthened 21 (*eméš) vs. lengthened 25 (*xésed). Proto 11 (*a, e.g., xačjó “animal,” páxad) split into unlengthened 11 (*xačjó) vs. lengthened 13 (*páxad) with dialectological consequences parallel to those in the Semitic component of Yiddish (see above). Wherever a Tiberian form did not meet the structural description (the conditions, so to speak) of the sound shift, it escaped Lengthening. In the samples cited, the first e in eméš escaped because it was not stressed (there is no evidence that hâṭef vowels differed in Proto-Ashkenazic from their non-hâṭef variants). The a of xačjó was originally in a closed syllable (opened only later by Degemination, no. 3). Cf. the Tiberian cognates רְעָה héšed, רְעָה eméš, רְעָה hajjó, רְעָה pádád.

(3) Degemination


(4) Stress Shift

Formal Ashkenazic was never processed by Stress Shift, but many forms of Popular Ashkenazic were, in varying degrees, under the impact of the Semitic component in Yiddish (cf. Katz 1980; and above). Stress Shift entailed the collapse of ultimate and penultimate stress to a unitary pattern of penultimate accentuation, e.g., *axašvéros “[King] Ahasuerus” < *axašvéros, *rōş haššén “New Year” < *rōš haššén, *sšlax “(he) sent” < *sšlax (cf. Tiberian cognates שֵׁלָח p̄aḥašvéros, נַעֲשֶׂה שֵׁלָח rōš haššén, גִּלְבָּל sšlách).

There are a number of categories of exceptions. In morphology, articles and particles do not generally accept stress, hence monosyllables preceded by these retain stress, e.g., *hâš “the man” (< שָׁם hâš) never became hâš (the black dot distinguishes spurious forms from asterisked reconstructions, which are at any rate not meant to be spurious). In semantics, particularly sacred terms, notably names of
God, retained ultimate stress, e.g., *elôhîm “God” did not usually undergo Stress Shift to elôhîm (cf. יְלֹהֵם yelôhîm). In phonology, if the penultimate and antepenultimate syllable vowels are both long, stress may move back to the antepenult, e.g., Northeastern gêjrašîn, Mideastern gâjrašîn “laws of divorces” (cf. דַּבְּרַשׁין dâvrâšîn), cf. Leibel 1965.

(5) Great Yiddish Vowel Shift

Ashkenazic was fully processed by the Great Yiddish Vowel Shift, which paved the way for it to follow the major events in the ensuing phonological history of the various Yiddish dialects. The Great Shift included raising of *ê25 ḫê25 and *ê12 ḫê12; lowering and diphthongization of old *ê22 to ê22 and old *ô22 to ūô22 (for a more detailed survey, see Katz 1982: 77–81).

By the Great Vowel Shift, then, *xêzêsêd > xêsed, *dôvîd > dôvîd, *xêleks > xêlek, *ôlôm > ûlôm. These processed forms are amply attested in Western Yiddish. In Eastern Ashkenazic dialects, further phonological development gave the characteristic modern forms (Northeastern xêzêsêd, dôvîd, xêlek, eûlôm; Mideastern xêjêsêd, dôvîd, xûjêlek, eûlôm).

Questions of Relative and Absolute Chronology

Consonantal shifts and the Great Vowel Shift can, from a structural point of view, be ordered anywhere. Consonantal shifts are tentatively assigned to (1) because of the speed with which Semitic sounds would have a priori disappeared among a population shifting to a central European base of articulation (cf. above). The Great Vowel Shift results in vowels largely preserved in Western Yiddish, and the similarity of its results to a documented near-modern variety might augur for a late relative dating.

The internal ordering of Lengthening and Degemination cannot be determined because their environments are mutually exclusive: stressed open-syllabic short vowels are in Tiberian phonology never followed by a geminate consonant. Indeed, geminate consonants invariably close the preceding syllable.

What is certain is that Lengthening preceded Stress Shift. This is evident from forms such as Popular Mideastern Ashkenazic élûl “(month of) Elul,” êmês “true.” One of the conditions for Lengthening is stress. At the time of Lengthening, these items were still ultimately stressed (*emês, *elûl), hence their escape, whereas items such as xêsêd “kindness” and rêgâ “moment,” both historically penultimate, were duly processed by Lengthening, hence modern (Popular) Mideastern Ashkenazic élûl, êmês vs xêsêd, rêgâ (cf. Tiberian כֵּס régô). By virtue of Stress Shift, the effects of Lengthening, originally allophonic, became phonemicized (ê and ô both occur in stressed open-syllabic position).

It is extremely probable that Degemination also preceded Stress Shift. Circumstantial evidence comes from forms such as Popular Mideastern Ashkenazic hêkâşi “(type of) analogy,” sâbôś “Sabbath.” At the time of Lengthening, these items were still in closed syllables (*hek/kês, *sâb/bôd), hence their escape, whereas items such
as *hével “vanity” and *jáhaḏ “together,” historically in open syllables, were duly processed by Lengthening, hence modern (Popular) Mideastern Ashkenazic hékajš vs. héjvel, sábọs vs. jáxad (cf. Tiberian ḫeqéš, ẖével; šabbōš “Sabbath,” jámá jágad). Note that a forms such as jáxad occur only in the more conservative Southwestern portions of Mideastern Ashkenazic (e.g., Stendel 1978). In many varieties of Mideastern Ashkenazic, these forms have been shortened to a. The evidence here is “circumstantial” because stresslessness can also explain nonlengthening of historical e and a in such forms as hékajš and sábọs. In other words, lack of stress can itself explain all the unlengthened forms, whereas erstwhile presence of geminate consonants (closing the preceding syllable, thereby blocking lengthening) can explain only some of them.

The absolute chronology of Degemination is assisted by Yekusiel of Prague. He notes that dagesh forte (= dagesh ḥazaq, the diacritic marking gemination) was pronounced for w, z, t, l, m, n, s, š, ẓ, š “by most people of our land,” but moans that “the younger readers were in the habit of not pronouncing dagesh forte in these letters when shewa occurs under the letter with the dagesh [i.e., when the relevant consonant is followed by shewa].” A bit later in the same discussion, Yekusiel’s characterization of those who fail to geminate sours a bit, proceeding from youth to boorishness. He notes that “for the letters w, z, t, l, m, n, s, š, ẓ, š, the boors miss out on their dagesh, as we said, when shewa occurs under the letter with the dagesh” (Yekusiel 1395: [187b]).

**Mobile Shewa**

The fate of mobile shewa in Ashkenazic, like so many of the issues touched upon, needs to be the object of a monograph. In the most formal style of reading by trained readers, mobile shewa will appear as a shewa vowel (locally [a], [i], [I], [a], etc.). In Popular Ashkenazic, however, historical mobile shewa underwent various fates. It was reduced to zero in phonetic environments where Yiddish tolerates consonant clusters, e.g., Northeastern Ashkenazic krejvš “close” (qreqvš, gvoľ “border” (qweed, hɔs “she went” (hɔxvš. Contextual loss of mobile shewa may result in wholesale remake of the classical Tiberian CV(C) syllabic structure, e.g., the last cited example, where CV|CV|CV → CVC|CV. There is, however, conflicting evidence from Closed Syllable Shortening that some graphic shewas which classical Hebrew grammar regards as mobile were in fact silent long before Ashkenaz Cf., e.g., Mideastern šafam “scribes,” sənam “enemies” where the short vowel betrays a pre-Ashkenazic closed syllable. The Yiddish forms cannot derive from šo | no | rim, so | fo | rim.

Possibly as a hypercorrection introduced to combat shewa loss, and possibly as a normal sound shift buttressed by penultimate stress in popular renditions of Ashkenazic (and maybe even both), shewas that do survive have been known in many forms of Ashkenazic to be “exaggerated” to vowel 22, i.e., to merge with the local realization of šere (see, e.g., Emden 1745: 4a; Wessely 1827: 204). In many variants of Yiddish, in fact, the name of the shewa vowel has itself shifted to 22, e.g., (some) Mideastern Yiddish sə⁻wa, (some) Southeastern, Northeastern səwə⁻va, both alongside expected šuvo, švo respectively (cf. špoš šoź).
Old East and Old West Ashkenaz

Two Kinds of Ashkenazim

Ashkenaz, in its early history, comprised two culturally distinct groups. The most famous, in the Rhineland, was centered in the cities of Speyer, Worms, and Mainz (collectively known as Shum, from the Hebrew acronym שומ). The second grouping lay further eastward on the banks of the Danube and the surrounding areas, centered in Regensburg, Rothenburg, Nuremberg, and also Prague. That is the area that was the Eastern Ashkenaz of those days. In later centuries, of course, it along with the Rhineland became the new Western Ashkenaz, in contradistinction to the later and modern Eastern Ashkenaz of the Slavonic and Baltic lands (see Katz 1987a: 54–55; 1990; 1991; 1992).

Two Distinct Languages

The western communities, in the Rhineland, spoke a Germanic-based Jewish language that was not Yiddish, and used a liturgical form of Hebrew and Aramaic that was not at all like any known variety of Ashkenazic. Both the Semitic component of the Rhineland Jewish language and its speakers’ pronunciations of Hebrew and Aramaic had a five-vowel system very much like the vocalism of Sephardic Hebrew, in which qa/meš and path-/ were merged as unitary a, šere and segol as unitary e, holem and qa/meš qatan as unitary o, long and short šireq as unitary i, and long and short shureq as u. This is betrayed in medieval manuscripts by massive promiscuous confounding of qa/meš with path-/ and šere with segol (see Katz 1987a: 56).

Moreover classical [h], represented by the Hebrew letter ה (classical ה, heθ), had merged with [h] among the old Rhinelanders, rather than with [x] (cf. M. Weinreich 1958; Katz 1987a: 57; 1988a: 39–42; 1990b; 1991; 1992). In fact, this isogloss provided the names of the two groups. In Old Ashkenazic folklore, the westerners were known as רומא/נבוי bnej hes “Children of hes,” i.e., “those who pronounce ‘hes’ for ה.” The easterners as bnej xes “those who pronounce ‘xes’ for ה.” The fictitious letter רומא/ (hes) was coined to poke fun at the westerners. Westerners occasionally used the spelling רומא/ to refer to the [x] pronunciation of the easterners. These names invoke a humorous reference to the biblical Children of Heth of Genesis 23 (see Katz 1991, 1992).

This shibboleth refers to the two groups in all sorts of legal, cultural, and folkloristic contexts. For example, in his responsa, the Maharil (acronym of Moyreynu Horav Yankev Halevvi, also known as Mahari Segal; Yankev Segal; Mahari Molin; Yankev ben Moyshe Halevvi Moellin/Molin, ca. 1360–1427) notes a difference in custom concerning the tfilin (phylacteries) donned during weekday morning prayer. The question concerns the positioning of the box of the tfilin shel yad (“hand phylactery”), whether it should be placed with the maabarto (aperture at one end of the box through which the strap passes) at top or at bottom. The easterners positioned the box so that the end with the maabarto and strap are at bottom, closer to the hand. By contrast, the western tradition placed the side with the maabarto at the top, closer to the head (both descriptions assume the arm is at rest at one’s side).
The Maharil put it this way:

_Tfilin shel yad bnei estrajkh_ ["the Children of Austria"] and all the regions of the _bnei hes_ position the _maabarto_ toward the hand; and we, the Children of the Rhine and all the _bnei hes_, position the _maabarto_ toward the body, as with the head phylactery.

(Maharil 1556: 6a)

Added to their five-vowel system and their _h_ realization of _n_, the Rhinelanders had a third major linguistic feature. Yekusiel of Prague noted that:

We also know that there are some Ashkenazim who pronounce _n_ [ _hê_ = _h_ ] and _n_ [ _hêd_ = _h_ ] as one and likewise _v_ [ _sin_ = _s_ ] and _v_ [ _sin_ = _s_ ].

(Yekusiel 1395: [189b])

In pointed Hebrew and Aramaic texts, (_v_) marked by the diacritic to the left denotes an _s_ rather than an _[s]_ pronunciation (the letter is known as _sin_, _šin_, _smal_ or _der smal_ in Yiddish). Transcribed _[s]_ by Semitists to distinguish it from _samekh_ ( _v_ ), it was nevertheless merged with _samekh_ long before the European period in Jewish history, and attempts to prove otherwise have not succeeded (see Faber 1982: 86). On the fate of Hebrew sibilants in medieval Europe, see Gumpertz (1942; 1953: 33–50), M. Weinreich (1973: 2:36–38, 4:31–55) and Faber (1982; 1987: 18).

By the early thirteenth century, then, it was known to Yekusiel of Prague that the subgroup of Ashkenazim who had merged _[h]_ with _[h]_, i.e., the _bnei hes_, had also merged _[s]_ and _[s]_. Unlike _[h]_, which is limited to the Semitic component, _[s]_ and _[s]_ are well represented in the Germanic component, and so in a stroke Yekusiel solves for us the old question of why a single grapheme, (_v_), is used almost exclusively for both historical _[s]_ and _[s]_ in old Yiddish texts (see, e.g., Shtif 1928: 143–46; Timm 1987: 272–73; Kerler 1988: 227–28).

_Destinies of the Two Branches of Old Ashkenaz_

Both the vernacular of the early Rhineland Jews, and their Hebrew and Aramaic phonology, became extinct many centuries ago, although not without leaving traces in both Yiddish and Ashkenazic. The language of Danube Jewry—_Yiddish_—and its Hebrew and Aramaic phonology—_Ashkenazic_—spread to the four corners of Ashkenaz, and, via migration in recent centuries, to many parts of the world.

_Social and Contextual Dialects_

(Formal vs. Popular Ashkenazic)

Ashkenazic shares with natural languages social and contextual variation. Nearly all that variation can be measured on a scale extending from the pole of "Formal Ashkenazic" to a variety incorporating features of the coterritorial Semitic component in Yiddish, principally: Closed Syllable Shortening, Penultimate Stress Assignment, and Posttonic Reduction (see above). Varieties incorporating one or more of these Yiddish features may collectively be called "Popular Ashkenazic."
The Ashkenazic Continuum

One might a priori postulate that social prestige necessarily slips downward from Formal Ashkenazic to the forms processed by Closed Syllable Shortening, Penultimate Stress Assignment and Posttonic Reduction. One would be misguided. It all depends on what is being uttered, by whom, and in what context. As it happens, Popular Ashkenazic is used in the highest academic endeavours of Ashkenazic society, Talmud and Kabbalah, which are studied from unpointed texts. The same scholar who will read dem “blood” in the Bible, or in reciting the ten plagues at Passover seyder, will use dam, with Closed Syllable Shortening, in Talmud study (cf. Tiberian dem). On the other hand, in synagogue reading from the Pentateuch and weekly portions from the Prophets, Formal Ashkenazic would be the variety aspired to (with the advent of possible interference from varieties of Popular Ashkenazic, or, in other words, interference from the phonology of the vernacular). Use of Popular Ashkenazic in Torah reading might well be taken as a sign of ignorance and lack of education. Khayim ben Moyshe Lifshitz summed up the differential this way in his Seyfer derekh khayim (“Book of the Way of Life”):

A man should be careful to read with the Accents [i.e. the Tiberian stress marks] everything that is from the Torah, the Prophets and the Hagiographa [i.e. anything from the Hebrew Bible]; analogously, [a man should be careful to read] Mishna and Gemara [= the Talmud] with the [traditional] melody.

(Lifshitz 1703: 20b, no. 28.9)

Jacob Emden allowed rather more leeway:

One should be careful with mileyl ["penultimate stress"] and milra ["final stress"], for whom it is possible and knows these things. But for the man who did not acquire this habit in his youth, it is impossible to bother him with placing of the accents for this would trouble him so and make his speech weary, and his loss is greater than his reward.

(Emden 1745: 4a–4b)

Between the poles of Formal Ashkenazic for biblical readings in synagogue and Popular Ashkenazic for Talmud, Kabbalah, and an array of informal and semiformal uses of phrases and formulas, there is a huge middle ground with considerable variation. Much of that middle ground is occupied by the daily and festival liturgy, and by Torah study (as opposed to formal synagogue reading). The first two words of most blessings, classical הָרֻפַּא מִלָּחְךָ בֵּרַע בּוּדָא תַּבֹּט “Blessed art Thou,” and the first two words of the Bible, ובשֵׁם הָדוּשׁה הָרֻפַּא “In the beginning created,” occur inter alia in variants illustrated in Table 4.12. Note the appearance of pretonic reduction (no. 2).

The complex phonological and sociological interplay of stress pattern and vowel reduction merits a monograph. The same Northeasterner, say, who might have břešism bór when reading the text more rapidly at home, břešism bór in a more comfortable setting of study, and břešim bór when citing the Hebrew passage in a Yiddish conversation. Like many generalizations, these can serve for orientation but cannot do justice to the complexity of real life. In one and the same genre, considerable sociolinguistic
Table 4.12. The Ashkenazic Continuum: Realizations of בּוֹרֵךְ נַעֲרֵי and בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ בּוֹרֵךְ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Northeastern</th>
<th>Mideastern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Formal Ashkenazic:</td>
<td>בּוֹרֵךְ אוֹ</td>
<td>בּוֹרֵךְ אוֹ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ</td>
<td>בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. With Pretonic Reduction:</td>
<td>בּוֹרֵךְ אֵוֶ</td>
<td>בּוֹרֵךְ אֵוֶ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ</td>
<td>בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. With Stress Shift:</td>
<td>בּוֹרֵךְ אוֹ</td>
<td>בּוֹרֵךְ אוֹ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ</td>
<td>בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. With Stress Shift and Posttonic Reduction:</td>
<td>בּוֹרֵךְ אֵוֶ</td>
<td>בּוֹרֵךְ אֵוֶ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ</td>
<td>בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

variation can be observed. Appendix 1 provides two renditions of the first chapter of the Book of Esther (traditionally read twice in synagogue during the festival of Purim). The first approaches Formal Ashkenazic (with some incursions by Penultimate Stress Assignment). The second is in a variety of Popular Ashkenazic (with mixed stress patterns and several hypercorrections).

In some cases, a semantic distinction is supported by pronunciations taken from different rungs on the Ashkenazic continuum. The same Northeasterner, say, who might have בּוֹרֵךְ לָוָי or בּוֹרֵךְ לָוָי “in the world” in the hallowed kaddish prayer, will say בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ לָוָי “generally,” “with no specific intention,” in equally hallowed Talmud study (cf. Tiberian בּוֹרֶהֶשׁ לָוָי). The sociophonological differentiation within Ashkenazic represents a treasure of research possibilities in the study of exotic forms of multilingualism.

Modern Standard Ashkenazic

In the nineteenth and twentieth century, various versions of Standard Ashkenazic arose. The classic variety of standard literary Ashkenazic follows Standard Yiddish in its vowel system, characterized as “Northeastern Yiddish except that vowel 42/44 is realized о as in the other Eastern Yiddish dialects, not е as in Northeastern.” As it happens, Standard Ashkenazic adopts penultimate stress, but not, on the whole, posttonic reduction. It is in this variety that some of the greatest modern Hebrew poetry was written. Israeli literary scholars, while Sephardicizing the vowels (merging qameṣ and pathah in a, šere and segol in e, šolem and qameṣ qatan in e), retain penultimate stress to preserve the rhythm of the poetry.

Standard Ashkenazic renditions of H. N. Bialik’sLOY bayoym veloy balaylo (“Not by day and not by night,” Israeli Hebrew Lo bayoym velo balayla) and of the original first verses of N. H. Imber’s Hatikvah appear in Appendix 2. With the final two lines rewritten after the author’s death, these verses became the Israeli national anthem. Note from these transcriptions that standard literary Ashkenazic does not spirantize across word boundaries (hence loy bajojm, not loy vajojm); it does not gen-
erally preserve pausal forms (balájla, not balájla); it often omits mobile shewa (pójsra, not pójsra).

A variant of standard Ashkenazic developed in the United States has ôu (or other local American reflexes of “long o” as in home) for holem. In the 1960s, it was used as the spoken language in the classroom for Jewish studies classes in New York City in a number of Hebrew day schools, including Etz Chaim, Rambam, and RJJ (Rabbi Jacob Joseph Yeshiva). The ôu for holem came to signify a Hebrew-speaking, Orthodox, pro-Zionist, Ashkenazic social setting. It was to the cultural “left” of those (Hasidim and “yeshiva circles”) using the East European aj. Ashkenazic in the British Isles similarly uses local reflexes of ou (as in home), or in circles consisting now mainly of older people au (“ou” as in round), for holem, variants possibly derived from older German Jewish practice. London Yiddish o for historical a (šāhos for šabos) seems not to have made many inroads into local Ashkenazic (which usually has expected šabos or šabos). Here again, as throughout the field of Ashkenazic studies, rewarding fieldwork awaits the researcher.

Epilogue

Sadly, the prejudices and misconceptions concerning Ashkenazic have, as is so often the case, affected scholars as much as others. Of necessity, much of twenty-first century Hebrew historical linguistics will concentrate on the Ashkenazic Hebrew and the Ashkenazic Aramaic that the twentieth century failed to study in depth. There are still many Ashkenazim born before World War II who use exotic and uncharted forms of Ashkenazic, and a rapidly dwindling few born before the First World War. There is still time to capture this invaluable linguistic data and still time to conserve this great Hebrew and Aramaic heritage, one of the most splendid and creative in the history of those languages.

Appendix 1. Two Versions of Esther, Chapter 1 in Varieties of Mideastern Ashkenazic

NOTE: These transcriptions aim at phonemic accuracy. In view of both informants’ chanting the text according to traditional Ashkenazic musical realizations of the Tiberian stress marks (which double as musical notes), there are instances where it is difficult to distinguish lexical from musical stress. Some ambiguities also arise concerning vowel length amongst the high vowels, ï/î and ū/û. In the transcription that follows, ë and û are distinguished because they are distinguished in the native Yiddish of the readers. Longer and shorter renditions of ū/, on the other hand, are strictly contextual variants in both Mideastern Yiddish and Ashkenazic, and are not distinguished in the transcription. Realization of ū/ is longest in stressed open syllables.

Informants’ texts are retained intact, even where they diverge from the accepted standard versions.
A: As chanted in synagogue, in London, on Purim of 1984 by Mr. Shimen Mandel, born 1951 in Antwerp. Mr. Mandel is a member of the Belz Hasidic community whose parents were born between 1925 and 1930 in central Galicia between Lancut and Belz.

1: vajahf bimaj axašvajrojś hī axašvajrojś hamajlajx majhōjdi vōād kī šējva vāesrim imāju medinān:

2: bajumim huahjim košējves hamējlex axašvajrojś al kīsāj malxisōj ašēr bašišān habirū:

3: bišnas šulōj lamolxōj usū mīštēj loxōl surōv vaavudōv xajl purās imudāj hapartamim vāsurāj hamadīnōjś lafunōv:

4: baharojśōj es ōjśer kovōjv malxisōj vōēs jakōr tifējres gadilusōj jumīm rabīm šmojnīm imaśs jōjm:

5: ivimlōjōs hajumim huahjle usu hamējlex loxōl huōm hanimećim bašišān habirū lemigudōjī vōād kutōn mīštēj šivās jumīm baxacār gīnas bīsan hamējlex:

6: xīr karpās isxājīes uxiż boxavlāj bīc væargumōn al galilaj xējsef vaamīdaj šājīs mīštōj zuhōv vuxējsef al rīcpas bāhat vūsājś vōdār vósajkūres:

7: vahasōjīs bixāj zuhōv vōxājlim mīkājlim šējmīm vajājīn malxīs rōv kajād hamējlex:

8: vahasōjīu xađōs ājn sīnājś kī xajn jisād hamējlex al kōl rav bajsōj laasējś kīrējīn iš vūiē:

9: gam vašī hamalkū osōsū mīštā nuśīm bājs hamalxīs ašēr lamējlex axašvajrojś:

10: bajōjim hašvī katōjī lajv hamējlex bajōjim umār limahīmon bīzasū xarvōjnu bīgsu vaavagūs zajsār vɔxarkās šivās hasurisim hamāšorāsīm es ponāj hamējlex axašvajrojś:

11: lōhuvi es vašī hamalkū līfnaj hamējlex bōxējeser malxīs lhašrōjīs huāmim vahasūrim es jofīs kī tojvās mārej hī:

12: vataμuājn hamalkū vašī luvōj bādvār hamējlex ašēr bajād hasurisim vajikcējī hamējlex maōjīd vałamusōj buārū voj:

13: vajōjmer hamējlex laxaxūmim jejdāj huūtīm kī xajn dvar hamējlex līfnaj kōl jajdāj dōs vudēn:

14: vahasčurōjv ajlōv karšōnū šajśār adμusū saršīs mējres màrsonu mānxōn šivās surāj purās imudāj rajāj ponāj hamējlex hajōjśim rīśōjnu bammālxis:

15: kādōs ma laasōjīs hamalkū vašī al ašēr laj osōsū es maamār hamējlex axašvajrojś bajād hasurisim:
16: vajóijmer mamíxén lifnáj haméjlex vohasúrim loj al haméjlex levádaj ošú vaší hamalkú kí al kol hasúrim voál kol huaimim ašér boxól madinájs haméjlex ahašvajrójš:
17: kí jajcág dvar hamalkú al kol hanyúim lohavszój baalajhén baajnájhén boomröm haméjlex ahašvajrójš umár lehuvi es vaší hamalkú lafúnov valúj vúu:
18: vohajójim hazéj tejmárnú surájs purás imudáj ašér šumí es dvar hamalkú laxójil suráj haméjlex ixódáj bizájajn vukučof:
19: im al haméjlex tejv jajcág dvar málxis milfunóv vajtukusáj badusáj purás imudáj valúj jaavójí ašér loj suvój vaší lifnáj haméjlex ahašvajrójš imálxísí jítájín haméjlex liřísí hatójvu miménu:
20: vanisímá pišgóm haméjlex ašér jaaséj boxól malxísij kí rabú hi voxól hanýúim jiténí jakór lóbaalajhén lamigúdójí vaád kutón:
21: vajítáv haduvór baajnáj haméjlex vahasúrim vajáas haméjlex kidvár mamíxór:
22: vajisíax safurím el kól madinájs haméjlex el madínú imódínú kixsvó voé am vuom kilšónaj lihijój kol iš sejráj boxajój imadabáj kilšón ajmój:

B: As chanted at home, in London, by Major Bogdanski, born 1912 in Piotrkow, Poland (Yiddish Pyeterkov), as per his memory of Piotrkow practice in his youth.

1: vajeshi bimáj ahašvajrójš hí ahašvajrójš hamójlaix majhójdi voád kiš ščyva vohérim imajú madínú:
2: bojumim húhájim kašéjves haméjlex ahašvajrójš al kisaj malxísaj ašér basňšan habíru:
3: bišnám šuljój lomakćý úsu mište laxól súrov vaavúdov xajj purás imudáj hapařomim vohúraj hamadinójí lafúnov:
4: boharajéj es sišer koavýd malxísj voes jakór tilójres gadišůj júmim rábim šmójnim imás jojm:
5: ivímíjójss hajúmim huajléj úsu haméjlex laxól huom hanimeim baššan habíru lamigúdójí vaád kúton mištej šivas júmim báxcar gínas bitán haméjlex:
6: xir karpaš isxájles úxiz boxávlaj vic voargúmim al galilaj kéjsef vamidaj šájš mátojs zúhov voxéjsef al ričpas bahát vůšájš vođár vossjxúres:
7: vohaškój boxléj zúhov vaxjím mikájlim šjním vohajin malxís rav kajáj haméjlex:
8: vohashiye ka'das ajn cjenaj k'i xajn jisad hamajlex
al kol rav bajaj lazajs kircjaj is vu;</n>9: gam vasti hamalku sesu mi'sej nusim babaijs
mlexx a'ser lamajlex axaxvajnaj;</n>10: bajajm hasvi katovj lajv hamajlex bajajin umar
limohimn bisaj xarvajnux bigus vaavajgux zaijsar
voxarakas 'ivs hasur'isim hamshorism es pnaj hamajlex
axaxvajnej;</n>11: lohuvi es vasti hamalku iifnaj hamajlex boxejser
malkis loharoj huamim vohasurim es jojiji k'i tovas
maraj hi;</n>12: vatmuajn hamalku va'ixi luvix bidvir hamajlex
as'er bajaj hasur'isim vajkeoj hamajlex maajd
vaxmusaj buaru boj;</n>13: vajjomer hamajlex laxaxumim jo'daj huitim k'i
xajn dovar hamajlex lifnaj kol j'odaj das vu'din;</n>14: vohakunx ajlvi k'arno su'ixor amusu tarijs
mejer ma'sonu monixon 'ivas su'raj pu'ras imudaj
r'ojaj
ponaj hamajlex hajjxsim ri'sn'aj hamalkis;</n>15: kodos ma lasajs hamalku va'shi al a'ser loj sesu es
maamaj hamajlex axaxvajnaj bajaj hasur'isim;</n>16: vajjomer monixon lifnaj hamajlex vohasurim loj
al hamajlex lovadoj ovzus' vasti hamalku k'i al kol
hasurim vaal kol huamim a'ser boxol madfnojs hamajlex
axaxvajnej;</n>17: k'i jajcaj davaj hamalku al kol hanusim lohavajs
baalajhen baajnajhen bo'mrom hamajlex axaxvajnaj
umar lohuvi es vasti hamalku lofusov volxi vu;</n>18: vohajjajm hazaj tejmarnu su'sn pu'ras imudaj a'ser
shim es davaj hamalku laxjo su'raj hamajlex ixdaj
biza'ojin vukucev;</n>19: im al hamajlex toj jajcaj davaj Malkis milfunov
vajikusaj bodusaj pu'ras imudaj volxi ja'ajvajr a'ser loj
tuvoj vasti lifnaj hamajlex axaxvajnaj umalkis'oj jita'ejn
hamajlex lirisu hatjyvu mimen;</n>20: venisma pisgo hamajlex a'ser ja'ase boxol
malkisaj k'i rabu hi vaxol hanusim jinmi jakor
lobaalajhen lamigudajal vaad kutan;</n>21: vajitav haduvor baajnaj hamajlex vohasurim
vajaas hamajlex kidvar monixon;</n>22: vajimaj safuurim el kol madfnos hamajlex el
madfnu vimdnux kixsuv no vaal am vuxim kilsjnej lihijej
kol is sojraj babaijs imdbajr kilsjnej ambaj.
Appendix 2. Two Modern Hebrew Poems in Standard Ashkenazic

Sung by Menke Katz (b. Sviántys, Lithuania 1906) in Spring Glen, New York, 8 October 1990, as remembered from New York in the 1920s. The informant’s text is retained intact. Note that in *Hatikvah* (text 2), adaptation of the words to its Bohemian melody results in most of the final words in each line being ultimately stressed, contrasting with the penultimate stress of the rest. The trochee-iasb pattern of each line is a characteristic feature of the song.

1. Bialik’s *Loy bayoym veloy balaylo*

   loj bajájim velaj balájlo  
   xereš ëjëj li atájlo  
   loj bohór velaj babiko  
   šíto šımö šom atiko  
   vohasito pjàso xidojs  
   umagidö hi asëdojs  
   es hašito esál óni  
   mi vomi jeché xasëni  
   umejájin jëvoj šíto  
   hamipójlin ñj milito  
   habmerkoçó jàavojx šviloj  
   im bomákblaj uvtarmiloj  
   uma jòvi li šilúmim  
   xaruzej pínim im algúmim  
   uma tsórej çax im šóxojr  
   almon hu im ñjdoj bóxur  
   šëmo zókejn šíto tójvo  
   òz loj ñsma òz loj ñjve  
   ñymar laëvi hamisëjni  
   uvjad zókejn al titnéjni  
   lëráglov èpoj vi xákejn  
   ax loj zàkejn ax loj zókejn.

2. *Imber’s Hatikvah (First Stanza and Refrain)*

   kol ojד baléjvov pnimó  
   néféj jehúdí hajmiš  
   ulfàašej mízrox kodimó  
   ájìn loçijn çajjió  
   ojד loj évdo tikvošëjnu  
   hatikvo hanejjío  
   lëšuv laërec avojsëjnu  
   loir bo dòvid xonó
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STENCLO, AVROM-NOKHEM. Taped interview, Whitechapel, 10 November, 1978


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be regarded as the conceptual coexistence of all dialect realizations of a single historical vowel (i.e., one occurring consistently in the same positions in the same words).

The sixteen diaphonemes are assigned numbers, facilitating discussion of any historical vowel or group of vowels (see Herzog 1965: 228 n. 1; Katz 1983b: 1021–24). The first digit represents the broad proto-quality posited by Max Weinreich, according to the code 1 = a, 2 = e, 3 = i, 4 = o and 5 = u. The second is a code for historical status, by which series 1 = short, series 2 = long, series 3 = short subject to early lengthening, and series 4 = diphthong. Series 1 and 2 have five vowels each, series 3 has two vowels, and series 4 has four vowels, making for a total of sixteen historical vowels. In any given variety of Yiddish, splits and new acquisitions from neighbouring languages increase the number, while mergers decrease it. The “magic number sixteen” is a unit of comparative Yiddish linguistics, and irrelevant to the synchronic analysis of any single dialect.

For example, Yiddish dialectologists may discuss notions such as “Northeastern Yiddish ej/22/24/42/44,” a formulation encompassing a mass of ideas and information, including “the Northeastern Yiddish synchronic vowel phoneme /ej/ which represents a merger of protovowels *e, *er, *er, and *ou” or, perhaps, “the Northeastern ej cognate with Northwestern ej, a, or ou”; or “the Northeastern vowel usually corresponding to classical Hebrew sere or holem and to Middle High German e, ei, o, or ou”; or any number of other potential statements of correspondence. Circularity is averted by the firm anchorage of each vowel number to an empirically real set of consistently corresponding realizations, in the same lexical items, amply documented in the dialects of the modern language.

It is not necessary to accept Max Weinreich’s or anybody else’s proposed phonetic protovalues to use the system. Vowel 12, for example, exists, in thousands of lexical items, and one can still refer to it as “vowel 12” even if one disagrees, as I do, with Max Weinreich’s reconstruction of the a quality which provides the first digit of “12” (I opt for open o, and thanks to the numbering system, historical interrelationships can be constructively discussed independently of any one phonetic reconstruction).

Two vowels in the system are not protovowels. They are the two Series 3 vowels (anomalously comprising 13 and 25, see Katz 1983b: 1024). They derive from 11 and 21, subjected to a lengthening that occurred very early in the history of the language, and one that has had repercussions throughout the phonological history of the language. For these reasons, they are included among the diaphonemes. A stricter protolanguage construction would eliminate them and regard 13 and 25 as the results of the splits effected by Open Syllable Lengthening on 11 and 21, respectively (see below for examples).

Table 4.1 provides an illustrative corpus of three items each from the Germanic component (GC) and Semitic component (SC) of Yiddish, except for those vowels which are usually exclusively Germanic (e.g., 24/44) or where fusions with Semitic component words are restricted to only portions of the Yiddish territory (see below). Major dialect reflexes of each vowel are provided, but for brevity illustrative words appear in their Standard Yiddish (StY) form.