לקט

‏יִידישע שטודיעס הײַנט‎ ⦿

Jiddistik heute

Yiddish Studies Today

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Jiddistik Edition & Forschung

Yiddish Editions & Research

יידיש אויסגאַבעס און פֿאָרשונג

ליקט

Der vorliegende Sammelband לקט eröffnet eine neue Reihe wissenschaftlicher Studien zur Jiddistik sowie philologischer Editionen und Studienausgaben jiddischer Literatur. Jiddisch, Englisch und Deutsch stehen als Publikationssprachen gleichberechtigt nebeneinander.

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יִידיש ❧ אויסגאַבעס און פֿאָרשונג

Jiddistik Edition & Forschung

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Herausgegeben von Marion Aptroot, Efrat Gal-Ed,
Roland Gruschka und Simon Neuberg

Band 1

לקט ❧ ייִדישע שטודיעס הײַנט

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Ken Frieden

Yiddish in Abramovitsh's Literary Revival of Hebrew

It is impossible to justify the wide-ranging disregard for the role of Yiddish in the creation of secular Hebrew literature during the nineteenth century. Only ideological bias can account for the failure to acknowledge the centrality of Yiddish in "the invention of modern Hebrew prose."[1] By examining S. Y. Abramovitsh's Hebrew translations of his Yiddish fiction, this article illustrates how the spoken language directly influenced modern Hebrew style. Based on the implicit presence of Yiddish in Hebrew writing, one may say that "Yiddish, like a dybbuk, haunted the evolution of modern Hebrew."[2]

In his seminal study *The Invention of Hebrew Prose*, Robert Alter retraces the rise of a new Hebrew style and points out that "this literary revolution was brought about by writers whose native language was Yiddish."[3] He goes on to write that Abramovitsh "sought, against all historical logic, to make Hebrew sound as though it were the living language of the Jews about whom he wrote." Moreover, Abramovitsh "worked to give it the suppleness, the colloquial vigor, and the nuanced referential precision of the Yiddish he had fashioned during his years of growth to artistic maturity."[4] Yet like most other critics of Hebrew literature, Alter minimizes the direct influence of Yiddish on Hebrew writing in the twentieth century, instead emphasizing Abramovitsh's use of post-biblical Hebrew.[5]

According to a century-old premise, Abramovitsh began a new era in Hebrew writing when he developed his so-called נוסח. Most scholars agree that his earliest Hebrew writing (1857–1862) was stiff, influ-

1   Alluding to the title of Robert Alter's book *The Invention of Hebrew Prose* (1988), which provides the best and clearest statement of the version of Hebrew literary history that was accepted throughout most of the twentieth century.
2   Frieden 2008.
3   Alter 1988: 17.
4   Ibid.: 29.
5   Ibid.: 30.

enced by the prevailing Haskala style, and that his innovative *nussāḥ* crystallized around 1886, when he began to publish Hebrew short stories.[6] In the intervening years between his early and late Hebrew works, Abramovitsh wrote his five Yiddish novels.[7] Having produced such compelling fiction in מאַמע־לשון, he attempted to achieve the same kind of success in Hebrew.[8] That was impossible, however, because even Abramovitsh could not make nineteenth-century Hebrew sound like an everyday vernacular. Yiddish and Yiddish-inflected Hebrew played an indispensible role in what Haim Nahman Bialik dubbed "Mendele's *nussāḥ*."[9] Only by emulating Yiddish could Abramovitsh create the illusion that Hebrew was a spoken language.

Bialik's essays show his scorn for Yiddish, his mother tongue, while also acknowledging the importance of translations from Yiddish in the Hebrew revival. After translating his Yiddish novel קיצור מסעות בנימין השלישי (The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third, 1878) in 1896, Abramovitsh began reworking דאָס ווינטשפֿינגערל (The Wishing-Ring) into the Hebrew version בעמק הבכא (In the Valley of Tears); this led Bialik to write sardonically, in a letter to Y. H. Ravnitzky dated 2 Elul 5659 (27 July 1899):[10]

ור׳ מנדלי שכתב ז׳רגון – תמידהני אם תהא לו כפרה עולמית. הלוואי שתועיל לו התשר־ בה שהוא שב בתרגמו עתה את כתביו עברית (בעמק הבכא).	And Reb Mendele, who wrote *zhargon* – I wonder whether he will find forgiveness eternally [in the World to Come]. May it help him that he has now atoned by translating his writings into Hebrew (*Bĕ-ʿēmeq ha-bākhā'*).

Abramovitsh's massive Hebrew rewriting of דאָס ווינטשפֿינגערל was printed serially under the title בעמק הבכא in Aḥad Haʿam's seminal Odessa journal of the so-called Hebrew תחיה ('revival,' 'rebirth,' 'renewal').[11]

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6   A diverging perspective is that of Reuven Merkin, who used statistical computer analysis to show that the translation ספר תולדות הטבע (The Book of Natural History), based on Harald Othmar Lenz's German work, served as Abramovitsh's language laboratory in 1862–1872; he notes the presence of foreign words from European languages (Merkin 1978 (I): 88) and Aramaic (Merkin 1978 (I): 92), arguing that this interim phase anticipated Abramovitsh's later accomplishments in Hebrew (cf. n. 44).

7   Frieden 1995: chapters 1–3.

8   Alter 1988: chapter 1.

9   Bialik 1911; see also Bialik 1965: 245–246. The Yiddish version of this essay was published in the collection of essays entitled קריטיק איבער מענדעלע מוכר־ספֿרים (Abramovitsh 1911: 151–155). See Bialik 1912: v; Bialik 1965: 242–245.

10   Bialik 1937 (I): 127, letter 57.

11   See *Ha-šilōaḥ* 1–4 (1896–1899), 7–8 (1901–1902), and 17–19 (1907–1909), as listed in Abramovitsh 1965: 12. For an English translation of the novel by Michael Wex, based on the

In Bialik's sarcastic formulation, this helped to atone for the guilt he had incurred by writing his earlier Yiddish novels. At about this time, Bialik also began his own Hebrew translation of the first eight chapters of Abramovitsh's expanded פֿישקע דער קרומער (Fishke the Lame, 1888), making efforts to diminish the traces of Yiddish in the Hebrew. While those opening chapters were published under the title ־ספר הקב צנים (The Book of Beggars) in 1901, Bialik had originally preferred what became the subtitle of that first printing, נון כפופה (Crooked [letter] Nun). Abramovitsh was unenthusiastic about this representation of the lame Fishke as a crooked Hebrew letter, and the subtitle was dropped in subsequent editions. In his translation, Bialik used exalted Hebrew – which, according to Yosef Klauzner, led Abramovitsh to comment that די כלה איז צו שיין.[12]

Bialik especially rejected hasidic influences on the new style. In his essay הספר העברי ("The Hebrew Book," 1913), Bialik lists hasidic stories as item 11b in his ambitious plan for a full library of the Hebrew literary tradition. But he suppresses the Yiddish connection and emphasizes the importance of Aramaic.[13] Although he wrote his essays in the aftermath of Martin Buber's popular retellings of hasidic tales, he was clearly not an admirer of their Hebrew and Yiddish sources.

Bialik and Y. H. Ravnitzky both argued that Abramovitsh superseded the quasi-biblical Haskala style – by creating a new, synthetic style. According to their interpretation of Hebrew literary history, Abramovitsh's *nussāḥ* brought together the many historical layers of biblical, mishnaic, and medieval Hebrew along with an Aramaic component.[14] At the same time, they neglected to acknowledge that hasidic Hebrew had been doing this effectively since the start of the nineteenth century.[15] Past articles have brought to light some problems associated with Abramovitsh's Hebrew synthesis.[16] The present analysis shows how Yiddish was essentially excluded from discussions of this synthetic style,

expanded Yiddish version, see Abramovitsh 1996.

12   Cf. Frieden 2007–2008: 173.

13   See *Kōl kitvēy Ḥ. N. Bialik*, pp. 204–211; for example, he states that the influence of Aramaic "on the soul of the people" was "a hundred times greater than that of all the Jewish jargons (הז׳רגונים היהודיים) put together" (208).

14   For Y. H. Ravnitzky's discussion, which preceded Bialik's, see Ravnitzky 1922: 166–175. The essay was first published (on the occasion of Abramovitsh's authorial Jubilee and seventieth birthday celebration) in *Ha-ʿōmer*, book 1, part 2 (1907): 23–31.

15   Lewis Glinert discusses the significance of hasidic Hebrew writing in Glinert 2005: XIII–XXVI.

16   See Frieden 2006, arguing that Aramaic introduces a high register that runs counter to the effect that Abramovitsh was seeking; he and Bialik sometimes tried to use Aramaic to suggest a folksy element, but this effect was viable only for (male) readers who had a traditional Talmudic education; and cf. Frieden 2007–2008.

and how it nevertheless played a major role in Abramovitsh's Hebrew *nussāḥ*. This is precisely what Haskala authors feared and tried to avoid: the scorned 'contamination' of their supposedly pure biblical Hebrew by post-biblical elements.

Incidentally, linguists have demonstrated that maskilic Hebrew writing was never as 'pure' as the maskilim claimed.[17] The most undesirable of the 'impure' elements was Yiddish,[18] and calques from Yiddish reminded educated Hebrew readers of 'low' hasidic Hebrew and of Joseph Perl's notorious parody מגלה־טמירין (Revealer of Secrets). The most prominent hasidic exemplars are the Hebrew versions of שבחי הבעש״ט (In Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov) and Nahman's סיפורי־מעשׂיות (Tales), both of which incorporate many Yiddish words and expressions.[19] Abramovitsh, tacitly at odds with Bialik, embraced the "contamination" of his *nussāḥ* by Yiddish – but without openly admitting it. Even Abramovitsh's adoption of Aramaic phrases embodied a veiled Yiddish connection, since most of the Aramaic he used was present in erudite Yiddish speech, when דרך הש״ס (the way of the Talmud) was embodied in Yeshiva studies.[20] In other instances, using Aramaic in his Hebrew fiction enabled Abramovitsh to create a higher register, sometimes paralleling the use of a higher-register Hebrew within Yiddish.

As Menaham Perry has shown, Abramovitsh's Hebrew writings often include Hebrew words or phrases that had taken on new meanings in Yiddish.[21] Abramovitsh wrote Hebrew for Yiddish speakers, and sometimes we can understand his Hebrew only if we think in Yiddish. For ideological reasons, literary historians have usually underestimated the role of Yiddish in Abramovitsh's Hebrew innovations.

The opening chapters of קיצור מסעות בנימין השלישי (The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third) are among Abramovitsh's earliest self-translations from Yiddish into Hebrew. After spending a decade writing new Hebrew stories, in 1896 he started transferring his Yiddish classics into Hebrew.[22] While *Benjamin the Third* is a parody of *Don Quixote*, Abramovitsh's 1878 Yiddish novel is also a parody of hasidic descrip-

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17 Cf. Frieden 2009: 4, note 4, which quotes Rabin 1985. See also Shakhevitch 1967: 236–242.

18 On the surface, Bialik states that Abramovitsh "broke down the wall between the two languages, spoken Yiddish and Hebrew." But his formulation indicates only that there was cross-fertilization between Abramovitsh's use of Yiddish and Hebrew. See Bialik 1965: 244.

19 See Unger 1961: 65–73, which provides a list of more than 100 entries.

20 Cf. Weinreich 2008 (1): chapter 3.

21 Perry 1968: section 7.

22 A few years later Bialik translated the first eight chapters of פֿישקע דער קרומער; unlike this partial rendering of פֿישקע דער קרומער into ספר הקבצנים, the translations of קיצור מסעות בנימין השלישי and דאָס ווינטשפֿינגערל were apparently the work of Abramovitsh alone. Starting in 1896, they were printed in the journals פרדס, השלח, and הדור, under the editorship of Ravnitzky, Aḥad Ha'am, and David Frishman.

tions of journeys to the Holy Land. Among other intertexts, the author was responding to specific, posthumously published works by Nathan Sternharz: חיי מוהר״ן (The Life of Rabbi Nahman, 1874) and ימי מוהרנ״ת (The Days of Rabbi Nathan, 1876). These two works, which include vivid travel narratives, made a serious – but seldom acknowledged – contribution to nineteenth-century Hebrew writing.[23] In Warsaw, I. L. Peretz openly drew inspiration from hasidic narrative for his neo-hasidic stories,[24] while Bialik and Dubnov were among the many Odessa authors who were skeptical of the Hebrew written by hasidim. Dubnov describes the Hebrew style of Nahman's tales as "vulgar and ugly, and the language – a bad translation from spoken Yiddish" (גס ומכוער, והלשון – תרגום עברי גרוע מיהודית המדוברת).[25] Dubnov later recalled that in 1891 he and Sholem Aleichem had jokingly exchanged letters in the mock-hasidic מגלה־טמירין־לשון (*Megale tmirin* idiom), following Joseph Perl's example.[26] That style came easily to them, since it was basically translated from Yiddish. Although Dubnov scorned hasidic Hebrew, he recognized – referring to the translation from דאָס װינטשפֿינגערל to בעמק הבכא – that Abramovitsh wrote Hebrew best when he was translating from a prior Yiddish original.[27]

When Abramovitsh transferred קיצור מסעות בנימין השלישי from *mame-loshn* into modern Hebrew, he further developed his emerging Hebrew *nussāḥ*. The versions of Benjamin the Third are easier to study than דאָס װינטשפֿינגערל and its Hebrew counterpart בעמק הבכא, which Abramovitsh kept revising and expanding in successive editions (Yiddish, 1865 and 1888–; Hebrew, 1896–). *Benjamin the Third* is also a unique case because, as part of its fictional pretense, the 1878 Yiddish novel already purports to be a translation from another European language.

Starting with his הקדמה to the 1896 Hebrew version of *Benjamin the Third*, Mendele Moykher Sforim (that is, the fictional persona who appears as editor and translator) frequently uses the same Hebrew words and phrases that were present in the Yiddish original.[28] Apart from the

23 Cf. Frieden 2005, 2009.
24 See Jacobson 1987: 30–41, which analyzes one instance in which Peretz reworks a dream narrative by Nahman of Bratslav from חיי מוהר״ן. See also Frieden 2002.
25 Dubnov 1975: 307.
26 Dubnov wrote that he and Sholem Aleichem "corresponded in the language of *Megale tmirin* – the comic Yiddishized [זשאַרגאָנישן] Hebrew of two hasidim, which one cannot read without laughing" (Dubnov 1929: 40 and cp. 59). David Assaf questions whether there is anything hasidic in the style of their Hebrew letters, which he published (Assaf 1999: 67). While they are not necessarily "hasidic" in character, they do exemplify the tacit influence of Yiddish on Hebrew writing of the time.
27 Dubnov 1929: 46.
28 References are to the Hebrew edition of קיצור מסעות בנימין השלישי that was included as

identical title, one minor initial observation is that the Hebrew render-
ing approximates the Yiddish spelling of many names, such as חייקעלי
and הכלבוני איציקיל for איציקל כל־בוניק (H 3 / Y 3). In the Hebrew version
Abramovitsh also often preserves the Yiddish spellings of names that
include the ־ל diminutive, or ־לי / ־לע, as in the name of his character
and persona Mendele.[29]

Words in the Hebrew version are often borrowed back from He-
brew loan words used in the Yiddish. In Benjamin the Third, Abramo-
vitsh's Yiddish is more Hebraized than in other novels he wrote, and
Benjamin's Hebrew, when quoted by the narrator, sounds pompous.
The imbedded Hebrew dimension enables Abramovitsh to foster his
pretense that the book has been translated from some other, unspeci-
fied language. For example, the second chapter opens with what is
supposed to be a direct quotation from Benjamin's travel narrative. As
Anita Norich and Dan Miron note in their essay on the Yiddish version
of *Benjamin the Third*, when the Hebrew נתגדלתי is glossed by the Yid-
dish בין איך נתגדל געוואָרן, it takes on a different character; they comment
that "bilingual discrepancies are made to turn Benjamin's pomposity
on itself. [...] The short paragraph is therefore full of contradictions
which are accentuated through its bilingualism."[30]

In Mendele's opening הקדמה to the Hebrew edition, many Hebrew
phrases are taken from the Yiddish, some with slight grammatical varia-
tion. These interlinguistic borrowings include:

> מכל שכן, כלי־זין, לפחות מאה כתות מלאכים, אדם הראשון, הנוסע האמתי, פה
> אחד, לשון קודש, ואני מענדעלי, כונתי תמיד, לא עליכם, הקטן מענדעלי.
> (Y 3–5 / H 3–4)

In the subsequent chapter, other Hebrew phrases of this kind include:

> כל ימי נתגדלתי, הצנועה מרת זעלדה תחיה, לשם שמים, כל מלכי מזרח ומערב,
> בעל־בטחון, השם יתברך, רחמים בני רחמים, מאכל מלכים, תוליכנו... קוממיות,
> מערת המכפלה, קבר רחל, כותל מערבי, חמי טבריא, הר הזיתים, היד רמה, עד
> מתי, שר של ישראל שולט, על עשרת השבטים, חרטומי מצרים, מצורף לזה,
> ניצוץ של נוסע, שבע החכמות, חדושים ונפלאות.
> (Y 6–11 / H 5–9)

a supplement to the journal *Pardes* (Odessa: Belinson, 1896). In the examples that follow,
page references to this edition are listed as "H," while references to the 1878 Yiddish version
are listed as "Y." Abramovitsh made many small changes for the final version published in
his collected works (1909–1912); if we are interested in understanding his development, it
is worthwhile to focus on the state of his art in 1896.
29   On "Mendele" as a persona rather than a pseudonym, see Miron 1996.
30   Miron and Norich 1980: 45, 47.

In just the opening two pages of *Benjamin the Third*, moreover, Abramovitsh transfers the following Hebrew words directly from the Yiddish version:

הבורא, הגלגלים, סחורה, קבצנים, רבותי, מקומות, נסיעה, ארצות, כח, שכל.

And in the next chapter there are many more Hebrew words taken directly from the Yiddish, such as:

שכנו\שכנים, סברות, ענין, גזרות, מפקיר, שלימות, תוגר, אביונים, מלאכה, שי־
דוך, חוץ, שבח, הלבשה, פירות, תמר, פאה, גבורה, מומחה, כלל, דוחק, הלבנה,
נלכד, מסוגל, הוספות, פשוט, נתפעל.
(Y 6–11 / H 5–9)

Then there are interesting cases of Hebrew verbal roots, already used in the Yiddish version, that shift from their Yiddish grammatical forms in returning to Hebrew:

להשיג becomes משׂיג זײַן
להפליג becomes מפֿליג צו זײַן
קנה לו שם becomes האָט [...] קונה־שם געוואָרען
נתחכמה becomes אַרויסוויײַזן זײַן חכמה
(H 5–6) איזו... פרנסה becomes (Y 6–7) וווי אַזוי ער איז זיך מפֿרנס

As suggested earlier, however, some of the most interesting cases involve a shift in meaning. The Yiddish usage of *khevre* in די גאַנצע חבֿרה is a definite shift away from Hebrew usage, so Abramovitsh preserves the root noun and gives us a very different phrase, "the rest of *ḥavērāw*," which changes the meaning (Y 4 / H 4). One might argue that Abramovitsh's embedding of Yiddish meanings in Hebrew phrases anticipates the ongoing developments over the subsequent century. Several authors have noted the implicit presence of Yiddish in modern Hebrew.[31]

An especially pertinent case is that of idiomatic Yiddish phrases that Abramovitsh chooses to transfer directly into Hebrew.[32] For instance, in *Benjamin the Third*, the conversation about a certain matter

[31]   See, for instance, Chanoch 1930: 89; Rubin 1945: 308; Chomsky 1957: 193–197; and Blanc 1965: 189. More recently, linguists such as Ghil'ad Zuckermann (2003) have emphasized the influence of Yiddish and other languages on modern Hebrew.
[32]   Y. H. Brenner's and Benjamin Harshav's Hebrew translations of Sholem Aleichem's Tevye stories are significant precisely because they use direct transfers of this kind and preserve the Yiddish idioms in Hebrew. See Brenner 1972 and Harshav 1983. Moreover, Brenner follows Abramovitsh's example by using the word קבצן to translate Tevye's Yiddish אָרעמאַן (Brenner 1972: 201).

(H) ‏כבדור של שלג‎ (‏Y 6‎) or ‏ווי אַ קויל פֿון שניי‎ (‏Y 6‎) rolls from house to house (‏ענין‎) 5). Snow may be found in the Hebrew Bible, but neither snowballs nor the derivative metaphor meaning "to snowball" were familiar in biblical or post-biblical Hebrew. Some other instances of idiomatic Yiddish similes transferred to Hebrew are:

(H 6) ‏כמו שאתה רואה אותי‎ becomes (‏Y 7‎) ‏אַזוי ווי איר קוקט מיך אָן‎

(H 7) ‏כאפרוח זה בתוך ביצה‎ becomes (‏Y 9‎) ‏ווי אַ הינדעלע, וואָס ליגט אין איי‎

‏כתולעת זו שקובעת דירתה‎ becomes (‏Y 9‎) ‏ווי אַ וואָרעם וואָס ליגט אין כריין‎ (H 7–8) ‏בתוך החזרת‎

These direct transfers show that Abramovitsh wanted to convey the Yiddish idioms rather than replace them with Hebrew idioms.

Three remarkable examples of Yiddish-inflected modern Hebrew usages that were popularized by Abramovitsh are *batlen*, *kabtsn*, and *nogid* (all used in relatively new senses). The name of Benjamin's fictional shtetl is *Tuneyadevke*, in the Yiddish, based on the Russian word for 'parasite,' тунеядец. In the Hebrew text, Mendele quotes Benjamin writing about his town named ‏בטלון‎,[33] linked to the word ‏בטלן‎. While *baṭlān* is a word that derives from ancient Hebrew and Aramaic, under the influence of Yiddish it took on a new meaning in modern Hebrew. Hasidic writers and their parodists (authors like Perl and Abramovitsh) were conduits, transferring new meanings ("new wine in old vessels") from Yiddish to Hebrew. ‏בטלן‎ was based on the ancient Hebrew verbal root *b-ṭ-l* (‏ב.ט.ל‎), meaning 'to annul'; hence the Talmud defines a village (‏כפר‎) as a place that has fewer than ten *baṭlānīn* (b. *Mĕgillāh* 3b), referring to unemployed men, or people of leisure.[34] In the Middle Ages, the meaning of *baṭlān* extended to include the meaning 'idler' and could designate a person who sits all day in the synagogue.[35]

Abramovitsh's use of ‏בטלן‎ in *Benjamin the Third* (H 4), referring to an impractical person or beggar, is sufficiently original that it is cited as an early example in Even-Shoshan's Hebrew dictionary[36] as well as in the most complete dictionary of *loshn-koydesh* words in Yiddish.[37] Abramovitsh popularized a new Hebrew usage by borrowing it back from Yiddish. So Yiddish gave Hebrew a new kind of ‏בטלן‎.

The word ‏בטלן‎ therefore illustrates the general phenomenon analyzed here: a Hebrew root takes on new meaning in Yiddish, and then

33   ‏„כל ימי – כך מספר בנימין השלישי בעצמו – כל ימי נתגדלתי בק״ק בטלון דמתקריא טונעיאדעװוקי‎, ‏בה היתה הורתי ולידתי, בה למדתי ודעה קניתי, ובה נשאתי למזל-טוב את זוגתי הצנועה מרת זעלדה‎ ‏תחיה.״‎ (Abramovitsh 1896: 5).

34   Jastrow 1992: 158.

35   K'na'ani 2000 (I): 131.

36   Even-Shoshan 1985 (I): 108c.

37   Niborski and Neuberg 1999: 25.

an innovator like Abramovitsh carries over this new meaning into Hebrew writing. This was not self-evident; Peretz called one of his earliest Yiddish stories דער משוגענער בטלן (1890), but when he translated it into Hebrew he dropped that Yiddish-Hebrew usage and called it מי אנכי?. In what seems to have been an unauthorized partial translation that was published in 1896, Berdichevsky also effaced the word *baṭlān* and called it שיודע לשאול.[38]

The word קבצן is even more striking, because it may never have been used as a noun in pre-modern Hebrew; it appears only in the verbal sense meaning לקבץ אותן, following the phrase קבצנו יחד (from the blessing for the ingathering of the exiles in the Amidah prayer). Again, this nominal usage originated in Yiddish before Abramovitsh and other writers exported it into Hebrew. In the 1878 Yiddish version of *Benjamin the Third*, קבצן occurs in a sentence that describes the men of Tuneyadevke as פֿריילעכע אבֿיונים, לוסטיקע קבצנים (Y 7), where these beggars are characterized by their practice of gathering alms. The word occurs twice in the parallel passage in the 1896 Hebrew version: הם בעצמם רובם (H 6) ככלם אביונים גדולים וקבצנים נוראים... אביונים שמחים, קבצנים טובי לב. Hence a few years later, while working with Bialik on the Hebrew translation of פֿישקע דער קרומער, when Abramovitsh did not like Bialik's idea of calling the Hebrew version נון כפופה, he chose the title ספר הקבצנים.[39] The convention of using satiric place names (like *Bitalon* or *Kabtsansk*) was well-established in Russian literature and influenced Jewish writers, but modern Hebrew בטלנים and קבצנים owe their existence to Yiddish. (Another 'poor' example is the word דלפון, based on a popular Midrash about the second son of Haman. Yiddish developed the meaning of *dalfn* as 'poor person' before it was exported into modern Hebrew.)

At the opposite end of the social hierarchy, נגיד originally means 'leader' in Hebrew, but it comes to mean 'rich man' in nineteenth-century Hebrew, under Yiddish influence. Abramovitsh uses the word in both his Yiddish and Hebrew versions of *Benjamin the Third* (see, for example, Y 6 and H 5); and in ספר הקבצנים, he uses it in quotation marks (chapter 14); characters jokingly refer to Fishke as a *nogid* (chapter 15); and the fictional character Mendele also uses the word ironically in letters, as when he writes to his low-class relative, addressing her as נגידה המפורסמת (ch. 12). Even-Shoshan cites Abramovitsh's Hebrew usage of נגיד in *Benjamin the Third* as an early example.[40]

38   See Berditchevsky 1966: 10. Cf. Avner Holtzman's note in Berditchevsky 1998 (III): 200, listing the publication data on Berdichevsky's loose translation: "*Še-yōdēaʿ liš'ōl (měʿat fīlōsōfyāh),*" was written at the end of 1894 – that is, before Abramovitsh's translation of *Benjamin the Third* was published – and printed in המליץ on 15 December 1896.

39   Cf. Dan Miron's discussion of the title in his afterword to the Hebrew edition (Abramovitsh 1988: 203–209).

40   Even-Shoshan 1985 (II): 824c.

Some of the most interesting linguistic innovations from the *těḥiyyāh* or "revival" of Hebrew are, then, neologisms in Hebrew that were inspired by Yiddish usage. For instance, Abramovitsh uses הדס כסף in Hebrew (H 8/8) to denote the Yiddish dead metaphor הדסל (Y 9/3), referring to a spice holder. Moreover, Abramovitsh apparently introduced a word for fraction, תשבורת (H 8), based on Yiddish usage בראָכצאָל or בראָכטייל.[41] In addition, Abramovitsh uses some Yiddish-based words that also appeared previously in hasidic texts, such as מוכסן (as distinct from the older Hebrew word for tax collector, מוכס).[42]

In the wake of Abramovitsh's usage, other authors followed suit, as we can easily confirm using the website of the Ben Yehuda Project[43] and other databases. Taken together, the Bar Ilan Judaic Library data base, the Ben Yehuda Project, and other emerging databases make it possible to study the linguistic shift of key words in Hebrew writing, and to help determine the influence of Yiddish on the Hebrew revival.[44] These resources show that many features of Yiddish gradually became absorbed into the bloodstream of modern Hebrew. The grammatical influences are just as important as the lexical examples.

It is also worthwhile to reexamine Abramovitsh's use of Aramaic in his Hebrew works. He resorted to Aramaic for several reasons: 1) to suggest a folksy tone; 2) contrariwise, to suggest a higher linguistic register; 3) to parallel the bilingual feel of the Yiddish version; and 4) to mimic Aramaic phrases that were present in Yiddish.

Possibly the most original and intriguing uses of Aramaic in Abramovitsh's Hebrew are linked to his effort to recreate the kind of bilingual play that characterizes his Yiddish version of *Benjamin the Third*. The opening pages of chapter 2 show this, because there Abramovitsh adds several Aramaisms that are not present in the Yiddish:

דמתקריא, בעלמא, לדוגמא, מילי דבדיחותא, איצטבא, יתערותא דלעילא, פור־
תא, עינא בישא, למאי נפקא מינה, מילתא זוטרתא, אנדרולמוסיא.

(Y 5–8)

41   Ibid. (IV): 1482b.
42   Cf. Sholem Aleichem's use of the word מוכסן in his Hebrew story אורייתא בגלותא (1976: 170); it was first published in המליץ, numbers 159, 161, and 164 in July–August 1890.
43   www.benyehuda.org
44   Reuven Merkin was ahead of his time when he used computer techniques to research his dissertation, *The Vocabulary of the Hebrew Writings of Sh. Y. Abramowitz* (Merkin 1987). He argues that Abramovitsh was already modifying his Hebrew style in the 1870s; the dating of his transformation does not, however, change the substance of this argument about the role of Yiddish (cf. n. 6).

While some of these words were common in Yiddish, Abramovitsh did not carry them over from the Yiddish source. Where the Yiddish can suggest a high and pretentious register by incorporating Hebrew, in Hebrew Abramovitsh sometimes achieves a similar differentiation by incorporating Aramaic. This is particularly well-suited to a travelogue by Abramovitsh's pretentious Benjamin, whose narrative is supposed to come across as a feeble imitation of distinguished European travelers and stylists. Much of the humor of the book derives from the clash between Benjamin's pretentious rhetoric and his comic incompetence.

The most important use and effect of Aramaic lies, however, in its tacit link to Yiddish. Because hundreds of Aramaic words were commonly used in Yiddish, at least when it was used as the language of instruction in yeshivas, these lexical elements remained active in the Yiddish vernacular. Although the imbedded Aramaic in Benjamin the Third reflects the narrator's pomposity, in other works it signals a low register by suggesting the Yiddish source.

Finally, we should note that when writing in Hebrew, Abramovitsh was comfortable incorporating actual Yiddish words such as הקפוטה (ראָסלפֿלייש, H 7/3) רוסילפלייש (פּיאטעס, H 6/1) פיאטעס (קאַפּאָטע, H 6/4) טעמביק (H 8/7, טעמפיק), or ירמולקות (H 7/12, יאַרמלקעס). Like other writers in the nineteenth century, Abramovitsh followed an orthographic custom of marking the Yiddish word with a quotation mark before the final character – as if it were an abbreviation.[45]

A new horizon is opening up for scholars of literature, as computer resources help to revolutionize our understanding of Hebrew and Yiddish literary and linguistic history.[46] Obviously there is no substitute for being well-read, but the databases enable us to make discoveries and confirm theories in ways that were not feasible in the past. This methodology will clarify the linked histories of modern Yiddish and Hebrew writing, showing how these languages have undergone such remarkable transformations in relation to one another.

45 Menahem Perry discusses one remarkable instance in which Abramovitsh tried to convey the Yiddish subtext. What was he to do with the Yiddish idioms such as איינרײדען זײא אײן בױך or אקינד [!] א קוה איז געפֿליגען איבערין דאך און געלייגט אײן אײ (Y 8; original orthography preserved)? He uses Aramaic, word play, and a remarkable innovation. Something that has been fantastically invented, like talking someone into an imaginary pregnancy, becomes the Aramaic עורבא פרח, while his rendering of the Chagall-like cow flying over the roof and laying an egg inserts the rare word כוי, which is mentioned in the Talmud ("a kind of bearded deer or antelope," Jastrow [1903] 1995: 618f.), sounds like קו, but refers to a different beast: כוי פרח באויר והטיל ביצה (H 7; see Perry 1968: 93b).

46 In the early 1980s, as part of my dissertation in comparative literature – which was published as Frieden 1985 – I used key word analysis, associating linguistic word shifts with intellectual history. My goal was to show how key words like 'daimon,' מלאך, and 'genius' both exerted influence on and reflected changes in cultural and intellectual history.

In twentieth-century Europe, in pre-state Palestine, and in post-Holocaust Israel, as part of the effort to recreate a viable Hebrew vernacular, Yiddish was openly suppressed by Zionist policies.[47] Despite this anti-Yiddish bias, in the twentieth century Yiddish words became integral to Israeli speech and writing. As we have seen in the literary realm, early modern Hebrew prose was often translated, explicitly or implicitly, from Yiddish. One may say that at times Yiddish has been concealed – like a palimpsest beneath an old document, or like a dybbuk inside someone possessed – within modern Hebrew writing. Some authors have called themselves "post-Zionist" thinkers, but perhaps what is needed in the twenty-first century, in order to facilitate a reevaluation of the intertwined literary and linguistic history, is a pre-Zionist study of Hebrew and Yiddish.

47   See Yael Chaver's study of this chapter in Hebrew literary history (Chaver 2004).
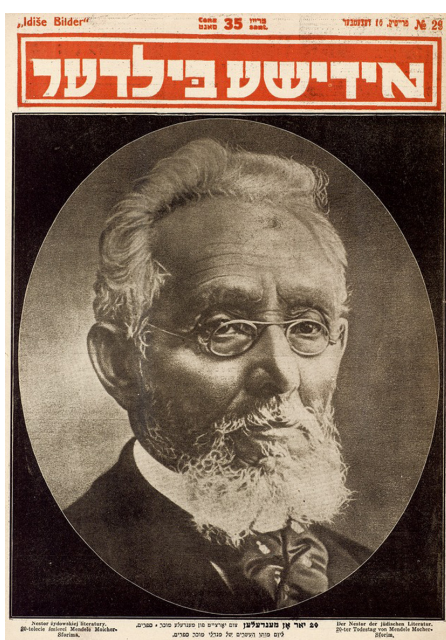
Sholem-Yankev Abramovitsh
Courtesy of University of Florida Digital Collections,
Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica
http://ufdc.ufl.edu/judaica

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