

ALEXANDER HARKAVY
AND HIS
TRILINGUAL DICTIONARY
DOVID KATZ

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*For this language I live
—Alexander Harkavy*

In 1925, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (*Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut*) was established in Vilna, on the initiative of Zelig-Hirsh Kalmanovitsh, Zalmen Reyzen, Nokhem Shtif, Max Weinreich, and other twentieth-century masters of Yiddish scholarship. Despite a paucity of resources, adverse political conditions, and other obstacles, it immediately set into motion a new spirit of creativity in Eastern Europe and internationally that centered upon the Yiddish language and Yiddish literature. The many scientific volumes in Yiddish philology, folklore, and literary history published by the struggling new institute won over Jewish and non-Jewish scholars alike to an exciting new intellectual venture—the study of Yiddish. During World War II, the international headquarters of YIVO was moved to New York City. Notwithstanding the tragic deaths of most of its leaders at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators, and the loss of its original home in the heartland of prewar Yiddish speaking East European Jewry, YIVO in America, evolved from its American Section, pressed onward. In addition to its three learned periodic journals, YIVO, in the American years, has provided a number of indispensable reference works in the field. Uriel Weinreich's *College Yiddish* (1949 and numerous revised reprints) facilitated the inclusion of courses in the Yiddish language in the American university curriculum. In 1950, there appeared Nokhem Stutschkoff's *Oytser fun der yidisher shprakh* (*Thesaurus of the Yiddish Language*), followed in 1968 by Uriel Weinreich's *Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary*. Max Weinreich's four-volume *Geshikhthe fun der yidisher shprakh* (*History of the Yiddish Language*) was published in 1973.

The late Gershon Harkavy (1904–84) of the Amalgamated Bank of New York generously provided me with many of the Harkavy materials used in preparing this essay.

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The present volume is a reprint of Alexander Harkavy's classic trilingual *Yidish-english-hebreisher verterbukk* (*Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary*). By placing this work back in the hands of an impatient public, YIVO hopes to continue to serve the reader, student, and scholar of Yiddish. At the same time, this reissue of Harkavy's dictionary focuses new attention upon the lifework of America's pioneer of Yiddish language and culture—a man who almost single-handedly created an intellectual environment conducive to Yiddish in an assimilation-prone society while masterminding Yiddish lexicography of the twentieth century.

Alexander Harkavy (May 5, 1863–November 2, 1939) was born in the village of Navar(e)dok (Nowogródek), White Russia. His youth and the renowned Lithuanian Jewish family from which he hails are outlined in his own autobiographical sketch (Harkavy 1935), written in a gracefully flowing Ashkenazic Hebrew. It is supplemented by a family history by Tsvi Harkavy (1953, 27–55), which contains further bibliography. The family was descended from the great Talmudist and kabbalist Mordkhe Yafe (Mordechai Jaffe, ca. 1535–1612). It traces its immediate dynastic prestige to Alexander's great-grandfather Gershn, who moved from Navaredok to Vilna where he became one of the pupils of the *Vilner goen* (the Gaon of Vilna) before migrating to the kabbalist community of Safad in northern Galilee, where he died around 1827. The name *Harkavy* is traced to Gershn's wife, Badane. According to family lore, she was called *Harkavi* from the Polish term for "pronouncing a guttural *r*," which she did. Aristocratic Polish visitors to the home used the term to refer to her with affection. Others, fancifully perhaps, have traced the name to the Hebrew root meaning "charioteering," and a number of family members use the Hebraic spelling.

The Harkavys were one of the first families of Jewish intellectual life in nineteenth-century *Lite* (the territory known as Lithuania from the Jewish cultural perspective, which does not conform to any set of historical political boundaries). They excelled in three spheres of Jewish cultural life: traditional Talmudic learning, modern Jewish historical research, and the then-nascent field of Yiddish research and publishing. The most luminous Harkavys are direct descendants of founder Gershn. His son Aleksander-Ziskind was *Navaredker rov* (rabbi of Navaredok) in the early nineteenth century. His great-grandson Dr. Avrom-Elyohu Harkavy, a pioneer in the field of Jewish interlinguistics, wrote an early study in Hebrew on the interrelationships between Yiddish and Slavic (A.-E. Harkavy 1867). Another great-grandchild, Dvoyre bas Reb Yoysef-Betsalel, became Dvoyre Romm after marrying into the first family of Vilna Yiddish publishing. The Romms, who set up shop in 1799 and continued running the firm until World War II, played an important role in the rise of modern Yiddish literature.

Alexander was born to Gershn's grandson Yoysef-Moyshe, a watchmaker and Talmudist (not an unusual combination in a nineteenth-century Lithuanian Jewish village), and his second wife, Freyde. Alexander recalls that his father did not care about business, and were it not for the small weekly income derived

from the family home bequeathed by grandfather Aleksander-Ziskind, the family would have starved. Alexander was eleven when his mother died at the age of twenty-nine. His sixty-two-year-old father could not take care of the child himself. Alexander moved in with his father's uncle, Gershn ben Moyshe.

Alexander's childhood and early education followed the characteristic path of nearly all of the modern giants of Yiddish culture. As a child in Navaredok, he studied the Five Books and the Talmud and their commentaries in accordance with Ashkenazic Jewish tradition; the Five Books along with the rest of the Jewish Bible, according to Mendelssohn's translation, with a semi-modern teacher; Russian, German, arithmetic, and geography with a private teacher, Yankev, son of his great-uncle and guardian Gershn; and Syriac on his own from a Syriac grammar in German that he happened to come across in his great-uncle's library. A precocious youngster, Alexander produced two issues of a handwritten Hebrew children's magazine at age thirteen or fourteen. No further issues appeared, because one of the village rich men whose Sabbath meal for the poor was humorously lambasted in the journal rewarded the boy with a smack for his efforts. He then began to write Hebrew poems and essays in the flowery *mlitse* style of the period.

In the summer of 1878, fifteen-year-old Alexander Harkavy made the five-day trek to Vilna to seek closer ties with the Vilna branch of the family, and new vistas of literature and culture in the large city. His reception by his well-to-do relatives, however, was not what he had hoped. Not wanting to spend all of his worldly wealth—six *gildn*—on a hotel, he slept in the wagon that brought him to Vilna and spent four months in a small synagogue in Vilna's *Yidishe gas* ("Jewish Street"). In late summer, he had a chance encounter with a woman relative. She was not impressed by his plans to immerse himself in learning and research, and offered to help him instead with something more practical. Alexander seized the opportunity to bring himself closer to the scene of Jewish literature in Vilna by suggesting typographical engraving as a career, and she arranged to have him study the trade at Romm's Vilna plant. He was taken on, however, as a polisher of letters. Later, after letting a not insubstantial number of letters go unpolished as a result of trying to read and work at once, he was made an accountant. The episode gave him something to eat, a place to live, and a chance to resume his studies of languages and literature in the usual random fashion of the young autodidacts of that era. During his Vilna years, he dabbled in art and wrote poems and essays in Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew. In the bookkeeping department, he made the acquaintance of such Vilna *maskilim* (Enlightenment proponents) as Mordkhe Plungyan, Elyohu Shereshevski, and Ayzik-Meyer Dik.

Harkavy soon became restless again. His migration to a still larger city, Warsaw, in the summer of 1881 proved to be short-lived. After a stint as a private Hebrew teacher in Bialistok and an untriumphant return to Vilna, he joined one of the youth groups who set out in 1882 to do collective farmwork in America. On the stopover at Liverpool, England, Harkavy met up with another teenager—Dovid Eydlshat, who was to become one of the most beloved Yiddish poets in

New York City in the 1880s and 1890s. His ship from Liverpool, the *British Prince*, landed in Philadelphia on May 30, 1882. After whirlwind sojourns in Castle Garden and Greenpoint, Long Island, Harkavy found himself in Division Street on New York's Lower East Side. He moved upstate to Pawling, in Dutchess County, to take a job with another immigrant as a farmer. After a month of milking cows, they both decided that farming was not for them after all and hiked back down to the city. There Harkavy worked as a cleaner, a machine operator in a *matse* factory, and at other odd jobs before landing a job with the East Broadway bookseller Yerukhem-Tsvi Kantrovits, thanks to his Romm family connections.

The story of Harkavy's marriage abounds in a number of legendary variants. They derive from his proposal of marriage to Bella Segalowsky just after she had attempted suicide. She accepted, and they lived in idyllic harmony (see Ravitsh 1980, 198). Her death in 1930 left him brokenhearted; he died a lonely man in New York's Broadway Central Hotel. The pictorial pamphlet he issued in her memory (Harkavy 1934) is one of his last publications. The version of their meeting that I heard as a child in New York from his cousin Gershon Harkavy, as I remember it, has it that Harkavy strolled across the Brooklyn Bridge, saw a young lady jump off, watched her rescue by a passing tugboat, followed her to the hospital, and asked her, when she came to, why she had jumped. It was the old story of the fiancé back in Europe writing to say that he was marrying someone else. At which point Alexander said, "*Nu, vosiz, mayn kind, Ikh'l mit dir khasene hobn*"—"So, what's the matter, my child, I'll marry you."

Harkavy recalls in his Hebrew memoirs (1935, 7–8) that as a very young boy he "felt a powerful love for the language of our people." His documented career in Yiddish starts in 1885, when he composed, while in Paris, "*Sfas yehudis*," a study in Hebrew of the Yiddish language. It drew swift praise from the French Talmudist Israel Michel Rabbinowicz. Excerpts published later in both Hebrew and Yiddish (Harkavy 1896; 1906), as well as his 1886 Yiddishist pamphlet in Yiddish, are scientifically based responses to the opprobrium then being heaped upon Yiddish. They are written in the spirit of Yehoyshue-Mordkhe Lifshits's classic defense of the language that had appeared in Alexander Tsederboym's Odessa journal *Kol mevaser* (Lifshits 1863). Both Lifshits's and Harkavy's papers are pioneering documents in the social and political struggle for the societal role of the language and the movement that later came to be known as Yiddishism, rather than technical philological studies per se. Like Lifshits before him in Russia, Harkavy in America went on to champion the language as well as to document its treasures in dictionaries of major historical importance. To understand the full impact of Harkavy as a founder of Yiddishism, it is important to bear in mind that his 1886 Yiddishist pamphlet appeared at a time (preceding Y. L. Peretz's literary debut) and in a place (America) where a pamphlet on behalf of the Yiddish language was both intellectually revolutionary and journalistically sensational.

In 1887 Harkavy took up a post as a Hebrew teacher in Montreal, where he published a single issue of Canada's first Yiddish newspaper, *Di tsayt*. This was followed in 1890 by *Der yidisher progres* in Baltimore, of which nine issues appeared. He worked from 1904 to 1909 for HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) at its Ellis Island office, teaching American history and the United States Constitution in Yiddish for the New York City Board of Education. In 1919 he was appointed a lecturer in older Yiddish literature and Yiddish grammar at New York's Yiddish Teachers' Seminary. Harkavy was also an active participant in the world of contemporary Yiddish literature and literary criticism (see Niger 1973, 279, 292; Ravitsh 1980, 198–200; Shulman 1979, 123, 457). During his many creative years in New York, he wrote a large number of educational books and pamphlets, most of which were published by the Hebrew Publishing Company.

The primary bibliography for Harkavy, as for almost any Yiddish writer of the period, is Zalmen Reyzen's *Leksikon* (1926–29, 1:794–803; see also Tshubinski 1960). A separate bibliography was compiled by the American Section of YIVO (1933). Harkavy's works fall into a number of categories. First are those on the Yiddish language which seek to bolster its standing (see YIVO 1933, 8–9, and as samples Harkavy 1886; 1894–95; 1896; 1906). The largest corpus consists of works which helped educate and acculturate millions of Jewish immigrants in America. This aspect of his career was launched by the five volumes (1895–1900) of the *Amerikanisher folks-kalendar* ("The American Folk Calendar"), which were miscellanies of information on everything from American politics to dentistry. They were followed over the decades by dozens of grammars and guides to letter writing in English; books on American, Jewish, and world history, as well as geography, physics, arithmetic, and modern Hebrew; translations of world literature; and revised editions of the Old Testament in Yiddish and English (see YIVO 1933, 10–14). Whether he was translating *Don Quixote* into Yiddish or compiling a new dictionary, Harkavy sought to educate the immigrant Jews of America with authentic renditions, not the hackwork so common in those years. Then there were the scholarly articles on a variety of subjects, but especially Yiddish linguistics and folklore (see YIVO 1933, 8–11, and as samples Harkavy 1895; 1901; 1924). Harkavy also edited a number of pivotal New York Yiddish literary anthologies which helped launch serious Yiddish literature on the East Side around the turn of the century (see Shulman 1979, 421–436), including ten issues of *Der nayer gayst* ("The New Spirit") in 1897 and 1898 and *Der tsvantsikster yorhundert* ("The Twentieth Century") in 1900. Finally, Harkavy published a substantial series of bilingual dictionaries starting with his 1891 *English-Yiddish Dictionary* and his 1898 *Yiddish-English Dictionary*.

Some strands of Harkavy's lifework have always appeared ambiguous to partisans of any particular twentieth-century Jewish cultural movement. How did it come to pass that the great Americanizer who published dozens of

grammars and handbooks to help immigrants adapt to American culture was also the champion of Yiddish, who published lessons in English to help American-born Jews master Yiddish? Why did the most loyal of American Yiddishists include Hebrew in a dictionary and continue writing in Hebrew as well? How many others wrote pamphlets and articles in Hebrew seeking to enhance the status of Yiddish? It is precisely his inner peace in loving, mastering, and propagating the heterogeneous threads of language and knowledge in modern American Jewish life that makes Alexander Harkavy one of the greatest immigrant Jews in American history. The immigrants had to learn English and elements of general education to take advantage of the opportunities the New World had to offer. At the same time, he felt, they could cultivate their own language with pride, seriousness, and devotion. Further, it was possible to build a Jewish life and literature in Yiddish while studying the ancient and modern treasures of Hebrew. These counterbalances are no mean achievement in an era characterized by bitter infighting, political squabbling, and ideological polarization in the immigrant Jewish community.

In the last years of his life, Harkavy, by then the unchallenged American hero of Yiddish language and culture, was acknowledged as a lexicographic grand master by international Yiddish scholarship. The establishment of YIVO in Vilna in 1925 had no small part to play in this belated but richly deserved recognition. YIVO invited Harkavy to summarize progress on his manuscript of his greatest lexicographic work, the “Yidisher folks-verterbukh” (“Yiddish Folk Dictionary”), a Yiddish-Yiddish defining dictionary—which has still not been published—in the first volume of its journal, *Yivo bleter* (Harkavy 1931). The new institute for Yiddish scholarship also compiled a bibliography of his major works on the occasion of his seventieth birthday (YIVO 1933) and published a gracious tribute (YIVO 1934) on the same occasion in an issue of its journal dedicated to Harkavy. In an instance of close cooperation between the worlds of organized Yiddish scholarship, on the one hand, and culture and literature on the other, YIVO joined with the New York Workmen’s Circle to organize a banquet in honor of Harkavy’s seventieth birthday in May, 1933. In its message to the banquet, the Vilna YIVO credited Harkavy’s half-century of work on behalf of Yiddish as having been instrumental in the creation of the Institute. The many tributes to Harkavy on his death in 1939 were characterized by that rare combination of awe and affection. He was credited for doing “more than any other man for the general education and Americanization of Jewish immigrants in the United States” (Richards 1940, 156) and for single-handedly turning around the American Jewish attitude toward the Yiddish language (Mark 1940, 162).

This dictionary has played a major bidirectional role over the last six decades in helping to educate East European Jewish immigrants in English and their children and grandchildren in Yiddish. It assumes an honored position in the intellectual history of Yiddish studies from three perspectives: first, within the

history of Yiddish dictionaries; second, within the broader history of Yiddish studies; and, finally, as an invaluable work of twentieth-century Yiddish scholarship for students of the language today.

Yiddish lexicography has its roots in medieval Europe, and it began with the practice of introducing individual Yiddish "glosses" to translate obscure Hebrew or Aramaic items at appropriate points in the margins of manuscripts. These later evolved into separate lists alongside their Hebrew counterparts, which became in effect, the first bilingual Yiddish dictionaries. With the advent of Yiddish printing in the sixteenth century, a large number of dictionaries in many lexicographic genres appeared (see Katz, in press). These include Bible concordances, such as Anshl's *Mirkeves hamishne*, which appeared in Cracow in 1534; Hebrew-Yiddish dictionaries in the classic Semitic mold of organizing material according to roots rather than words, such as Shvab and Ben-Yankev's *Seyfer meylits yoysher* (1773); dictionaries according to semantic categories (thesauruses) of which the most popular was probably the *Khinekh kotn*, published in Cracow in 1640 and many times thereafter throughout Europe. More specialized dictionaries appeared over the centuries to treat selected portions of Yiddish vocabulary. Among the most prominent of these are Ben-Gershon's *Seyfer sheymoyms* (1657) on names, Manesh's list of Yiddish words derived from Hebrew or Aramaic in his *Mare haksav* (ca. 1717) and the dictionary of internationally used words in Shevreshin, Bendin, and Marsn, *Seyfer khanekeh lanaar* (1713).

Harkavy's trilingual dictionary is the most outstanding instance of another genre in the history of Yiddish lexicography, one that is over four hundred years old—the multilingual dictionary comprising Yiddish, Hebrew, and one or more coterritorial non-Jewish languages. Its founder was Elye Bokher (Elijah Levita), the great Hebrew grammarian and Yiddish poet of the sixteenth century, best known for his poetic masterpiece *Bovo d'Antona* (1541; see Joffe 1949). His *Shmoyms dvorim* (1542) is a Yiddish-Hebrew-Latin-German dictionary, a precursor of Harkavy's dictionary. It was followed by, among others, Ben Yekusiel's *Seyfer diber tov* (1590), a Hebrew-Yiddish-Italian dictionary, and Nosn-Note Hanover's *Seyfer sofe brure* (1660), comprising Hebrew, Yiddish, Italian, and Latin. A posthumously published edition (Hanover 1701) included French as well.

Harkavy cannot be understood, however, solely from a historical perspective, as a Yiddish lexicographer in a tradition deriving from the early history of Ashkenaz in medieval Europe. A major conceptual difference severs all the older works on Yiddish from those written in the Yiddishist tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, namely, a new appreciation of the language as a national Jewish language suited to the highest pursuits of literature, culture, and the social sciences. And to understand Harkavy in the context of his contemporaries, it is necessary first to trace the schools that preceded the rise of the modern science of Yiddish. Few languages have been as extensively explored as Yiddish by people driven by as many intellectual motives (see Katz

1986). Humanist-inspired scholars of Hebrew and Aramaic in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries looked upon Yiddish as a curiosity combining the familiar Germanic with the exotic Semitic. One of them, Johann Boeschenstain, an itinerant Hebrew teacher, tacked an advertisement onto the door of a Regensburg inn in 1518 offering to teach Yiddish in six days and for a reasonable fee. A long tradition of "teach yourself Yiddish" handbooks for business people was launched by Paul Helicz (1543); the most esoteric work in this tradition was Reizenstein's 1764 manual of Yiddish for horsedealers. Missionaries from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries sought to propagate the study of Yiddish to train other missionaries and to communicate with the targeted Jewish population in its own language. It was a missionary, Johann Heinrich Callenberg, who established the world's first known university course in Yiddish in Halle in 1729. Criminologists wrote about Yiddish as a key to the German underworld language, which had borrowed thousands of words from both Hebrew and Yiddish.

While many of the hundreds of books and pieces on Yiddish written in these and other contexts are of value today only as curiosities, some are of permanent value to Yiddish scholarship. Their authors were both talented as descriptivists and broadminded enough to transcend their initial motivations and develop a profound scholarly dedication to Yiddish. Chrysander started out as a student in Callenberg's missionary-training program at Halle, but his 1750 grammar exhibits a brilliant perspective on the structure and history of Yiddish. Carl Wilhelm Friedrich wrote a masterly guide to the language for merchants and travelers (1784) that contains the first known attempt at a classification of Yiddish dialects. Avé-Lallemant, a German police chief who came to Yiddish via underworld-language studies, became a staunch devotee of Yiddish for its own sake; about half of his four-volume magnum opus (1858–1862), is dedicated to Yiddish. By the late nineteenth century, Yiddish studies acquired tangential status in comparative Germanic philology. Two Jews trained in comparative philology, Lazăr Șăineanu (1889) and Alfred Landau (1896), examined Yiddish from the scientific viewpoint of comparative Germanic philology and are identified with the academic school known to Yiddish scholars as the *germanistn* (Germanists).

In the late nineteenth century, the first works were written presaging a new field of Yiddish linguistics that would be conceptually centered upon the language itself and methodologically enhanced by respect and affection for the language. The new Yiddish philology, a self-contained universe of scholarly disciplines (linguistics, folklore, bibliography, literary history, and more) was proclaimed by Ber Borokhov (1913), who also envisioned a Yiddish academy created for research and teaching of the language. Although he did not live to see his dream come true, it was realized by his disciples in 1925 when YIVO was organized (see Shtif 1925 and M. Weinreich 1925). Several years before, the Yiddishist perspective on the language was outlined by Matisyohu Mieses (1908) at the celebrated Tshernovits (Chernowitz) Language Conference, where Yiddish was proclaimed a national Jewish language. Mieses and Borokhov

erected the conceptual edifice for the new school of *yidishistn*. As Borokhov put it, Yiddish philology was emerging as the scientific component of the social and cultural movement on behalf of Yiddish.

Three personalities stand out as the late nineteenth-century precursors of Mieses and Borokhov and of the scholarly achievements of Yiddish Studies in the twentieth century. All loved Yiddish passionately and all—autodidacts in linguistics—used the tools of linguistics to study the language. Philipp Mansch in Lemberg, although he wrote his study (1888–1890) in German in line with the *germanistn*, looked at each bit of Yiddish vocabulary, syntax, and phonology not from the viewpoint of German or some other external structure, but through the eyes of the analyzed language itself, in the spirit of the later *yidishistn*. His study was declared lost by a number of scholars, but in 1984 it was rediscovered in YIVO's archives by Christopher Hutton. Thanks to this discovery, it is now clear that Mansch's study is the "missing link" between the Germanist school that studies Yiddish as a Germanic language and the Yiddishist school for whom it is a self-contained branch of humanistic inquiry. The other two founders of modern Yiddish philology were the lexicographers Yehoyshue-Mordkhe Lifshits (1863; 1869) in Russia, who thoroughly documented his native Southeastern (popularly "Ukrainian") Yiddish, and Alexander Harkavy in America, who was the first to extensively document his native Northeastern (popularly "Lithuanian") Yiddish—the Yiddish spoken and written in the United States, and, most significantly, the language of the new literature and press that had blossomed by the turn of the century.

Harkavy's work initially drew substantial criticism. Noyakh Prilutski (1917, xiv), the grand master of Yiddish linguistics in Warsaw, reviewing the 1910 edition of Harkavy's *Yiddish-English Dictionary*, criticized the use of far too much *daytshmerish*—items taken from modern standard German, which often displaced genuine older Yiddish words, and which were in wide use in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—while praising his wealth of dialectological material. Max Weinreich (1923, 27), too, castigated him for Germanization in his early bidirectional dictionaries, but noted (p. 241) that Harkavy had promised in a 1922 article in New York's *Forverts* to de-Germanize the spelling of his forthcoming *Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary*. Harkavy kept his word. In a posthumously published paper, Max Weinreich (1971, 3) characterized Harkavy as having "weak normativist aspirations by nature, and investing his powers into the inventorization of his linguistic material." Lively discussion was also sparked by Harkavy's liberal inclusion of Anglicisms that had made their way into American Yiddish (see Niger 1941, 23). These two complaints—inclusion of *daytshmerish* and of English-derived items then current in American Yiddish speech—are the charges most frequently leveled against Harkavy's dictionaries.

Whether Harkavy was right or wrong to include masses of nineteenth-century borrowings from German then current in the Yiddish press (and, in many instances, in native Yiddish speech—then as well as now) depends on the

linguistic theory to which one subscribes. The debate is between the *normativists* (or *prescriptivists*) who believe in the active use of dictionaries and grammars to "change the language," and the *descriptivists* who believe that the task of grammarians and lexicographers is simply to describe what they see and hear. When his lifework is looked upon as a whole, Harkavy emerges as a moderate who defies labels. He believed in a normalized Yiddish orthography and grammar, but did not see it as the role of the dictionary compiler to represent anything other than the empirically observable language of the day. In the context of a journalistic format, he was more than willing to innovate. His *Yidisher progres* in Baltimore in 1890 was in fact the first newspaper anywhere with a reformed phonetic orthography approaching modern Yiddish spelling on major points. Harkavy had previously written a series of articles advocating orthographic reform (e.g. Harkavy 1888). It thus emerges that Harkavy the descriptivist was also one of the earliest pioneers of modern Yiddish spelling, later formulated scientifically by Ber Borokhov (1913, 18–22) and elaborated upon by Zalmen Reyzen (1920, 102–62). It was not until 1920 that the Yiddish literary world actually shed the written language of the nuisance of silent letters introduced by mid-nineteenth-century editors who made it a practice to copy modern standard German spelling right onto the Yiddish alphabet. Harkavy, ever faithful to contemporary linguistic truth, used the Germanized spelling he loathed in his pre-1920 dictionaries and the newly accepted Modern Yiddish Spelling after that year.

A similar tale is revealed by an examination of the actual lexicon in his earlier dictionaries as contrasted with this one. Most striking is the radical diminution of *daytshmerish* in his *Yiddish-Hebrew-English Dictionary*, when compared with his earlier bilingual Yiddish-English and English-Yiddish dictionaries. Nearly all the nineteenth-century borrowings from German that appear in the trilingual dictionary are items that took root in the language, are used in one or more genres of modern Yiddish literature, and can be heard in the Yiddish of native speakers. It is also possible that an analogous change of course underlies the banishment of the greatest concentration of Anglicisms to the 1928 addendum, keeping them segregated from the bulk of Yiddish vocabulary. These modifications attest to changes that were in progress in the literary Yiddish of the first quarter of the twentieth century.

This republication of Harkavy's *Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary* in no way displaces Uriel Weinreich's *Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary* (1968). In fact, the two complement each other. Weinreich's is a masterpiece of modern scientific lexicography that has become an international structural model for makers of other bilingual dictionaries. Its semantic structuring reflects the author's brilliant research in general linguistics. Its comprehensive analytical apparatus is tantamount to a Yiddish grammar compressed into a lexicographic format. Moreover, Weinreich's dictionary is bidirectional; it will therefore remain the first dictionary for elementary students of

Yiddish, for those seeking equivalents for the English vocabulary of modern science and technology, and for those desiring guidance on the attitudes of American Yiddish normativists toward a given item. For the last decade or so, however, the disappearance of Harkavy's trilingual dictionary from the market has been painful for more advanced students of the language requiring a more exhaustive coverage of the language of the nineteenth and twentieth century masters of modern Yiddish literature and a dictionary that is more descriptively oriented.

The student of Yiddish can supplement both Harkavy and Weinreich with the first four volumes of Yudel Mark's unabridged Yiddish-Yiddish defining dictionary, the *Groyser verterbukh fun der yidisher shprakh* ("Great Dictionary of the Yiddish Language," Joffe and Mark 1961; 1966; Mark 1971; 1980). The fourth volume reaches only to the end of the first letter of the Yiddish alphabet, *alef*. Still, they include far more of the Yiddish lexicon than a single letter of the alphabet might imply. They contain virtually most the verbs of Yiddish, in consequence of the large number of verbal prefixes beginning with *alef*, hence the inclusion of most verbs under one or more of their prefixed forms. Further, a disproportionately large part of Yiddish vocabulary begins with the letter *alef* by virtue of the seven vowels and diphthongs (*a*, *ay*, *ey*, *i*, *o*, *oy*, *u*) systematically marked or preceded by that letter at the beginning of a word. Preparation of additional volumes continues (see Moskovich and Wolf 1981).

Harkavy's *Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary* appeared in New York in 1925 and with a supplement in 1928. It was reissued many times thereafter by the Hebrew Publishing Company. The present reprint is a reproduction of the 1928 edition, with no further changes or corrections. The Yiddish student will have no difficulty in coping with the minor orthographic variations between this dictionary and the YIVO system employed in Uriel Weinreich's dictionary.

Because of its inherent simplicity and straightforwardness, there is no more need now for an elaborate guide to using the dictionary than there was in 1925. It is a book to be picked up and used as is, with its wealth and its blemishes. The extensive lexicographic coverage is enhanced by many of the pleasures long enjoyed by several generations of readers.

Harkavy's etymologies are often daring and sometimes shaky but usually enlightening and always delightful. See, for example, the entries on *akhberosh* (p. 348); *avekleygn dem tatn* (p. 233); *bahavnt* (p. 102); *baln* (p. 113); *bashaymperlakh* (p. 136); *belaz* (p. 125); *bobe-mayse* (p. 112); *es vendt zikh vu der khamer shteyt* (p. 229); *farfl* (p. 397); *fargliven* (p. 386); *genit* (p. 154); *gepleft* (p. 155); *hotseplots* (p. 185); *hoze* (p. 181); *kabtsn* (p. 448); *kalye (vern)* (p. 262); *katoves* (p. 574); *khonte* (p. 258); *khoyzek* (p. 225); *lekakh* (p. 281); *makheteys* (p. 285); *makhzokes* (p. 297); *mavrie* (p. 284); *mashkit* (p. 316); *milgroym* (p. 301); *mishteyns gezogt* (p. 303; see supplement p. 581); *nebakh* (p. 329); *nishkoshe* (p. 328); *nitl* (p. 326); *pankeven* (p. 360); *parev* (p. 363); *Rayzn* (p. 477); *shlimazl/shlimezaln* (p. 506); *shmadn (zikh)* (p. 508); *skotsl kumt* (p. 344; see

supplement p. 564); *terakh* (p. 524); (*nemen af*) *tsihunder* (p. 426); *toyte kloles/toyte shvues* (p. 236); *treybern* (p. 245); and *umgelumpert* (p. 28).

The dictionary includes a charming sprinkling of Old Yiddish, comprising archaic words and usages as well as *taytsh* words derived from the centuries-old tradition of phrase-by-phrase translation from sacred Hebrew or Aramaic texts into Yiddish. See as examples the entries for *bizkl*, *bizkn*, *bizkele* "until, as far as" (p. 118); *braylaf*, *brayleft* "wedding" (p. 134); *federn imetsn sholem* "be first in greeting a person" (p. 411); *hinerplet* "lethargy" (p. 193); *kern* "bride, bridegroom," rather than the usual "capital/principal, fund" (p. 468); *lindvorem* "winged dragon, flying serpent" (p. 277); and *vidmenen* "swarm" (p. 205). From East European Jewish folklore Harkavy brings such items as *banemung* "carrying away (of a child) by a demon" (p. 107) and *optsug* "self examination of a woman before coition" (p. 78). He notes that *khiber*—normally "composition, treatise, (arithmetic) addition" also meant "literary (rather than literal) translation" in Old Yiddish, i.e., one that preserved the syntax of the translation language—*khiber* in the sense of "interconnection of the words" (p. 551).

Harkavy relishes such Lower East Side evolutions as *afodern* "afford" (p. 70); *datl du* "that'll do" (p. 544); *endostn* "endorse" (p. 566); *eyer tsum yuzn* "eggs to use for smearing or mixing with dough but not for cooking or baking" (p. 554); *hobn a gud taym* "have a good time" (p. 583); *hor yop* "hurry up" (p. 547); *kakerutsh bos* "small employer," noting that it occurs among Jewish union workers (p. 576); *peyde* "salary" (p. 368); *poketbukh* "pocketbook" (p. 362); *to-let* "sign that says to let [for rent]" (p. 551); *sanovegon* "son of a gun," which is cross-referenced to *sanovebitsh* (p. 561); and *tsomis* "summons," credited to Yiddish in England (p. 415). In the 1928 addendum, Harkavy (p. 531) introduces supralinear diacritics to mark Yiddish *d*'s that correspond with English *th*, as in *clothing*, and Yiddish *t*'s that match English *th* in *nothing*, to help the immigrants spell English correctly. At the same time, he recognized these items as parts of the linguistic system of American *Yiddish*, and he tells the reader, in the same paragraph, to pronounce "plain *d* and *t*" in Yiddish.

Nowhere perhaps is Harkavy's unique ability to balance the need for Americanization with Yiddishist loyalty as evident as in the list of Yiddish names and their recommended English-language equivalents (pp. 525–30). To "gentilizers" of children's names he gives the options of biblical equivalents (Avrom/ Abraham) or "translative equivalents" (Zelig/Felix). Unlike just about all other "Americanizers," however, Harkavy gives the option (which barely got off the ground in American Jewry) of providing anglicized spellings of Yiddish names themselves (Alter, Charna, Kalman, Lippa, Malla, Sheftl, and Trytl). He often gives Yiddish names in American spelling, with the historical English or translative option following in parenthesis: Glicka (Felicia, Beatrice, p. 526), Sander (Alexander, p. 529), Shprintza (Hope, p. 530), Tryna (Catherine, p. 527) and Zlatta (Aurelia, p. 527).

There is a considerable corpus of material on dialects. Within the realm of

East European Yiddish, Harkavy is strongest on his native Lithuanian Yiddish, pinpointing, for example, *Ikh vel shikn nokh dir dem Broder shames* "I will send you a special messenger" as something he heard in his native Navaredok "fifty years ago" (p. 541). Western Yiddish, the largely moribund but once primary branch of Yiddish on German-speaking territory in Central Europe, is represented in surprising force, often derived, with full accreditation from Tirsch's *Handlexicon* (1782). He labels *khazer-bokher* "private tutor" (from *khazern* "to review [a lesson]") as "German Yiddish" (p. 226) and marks the use of *forshpil* (literally "prelude" or "foreplay") for "engagement, betrothal" as "archaic in Austria" (p. 403); *shander-bander*, a *kapore far eynander* "one is as bad as the other" (p. 485) is likewise attributed to Austria. Eastern Yiddish *yidishn* "circumcise" (literally "make Jewish") is contrasted with Western Yiddish *yidshn*, which Harkavy remarks is pronounced *yitshn* (p. 254). The numerous Western items cited include *piltsl* "girl" (p. 368); *plankhenen* "cry" (p. 371); *shkedele* "little box" (p. 518); and *tsaverle* "necktie," from *tsaver* "neck" (p. 416).

One of the best-known qualities of the dictionary is its author's folksiness and humility, so rarely found among "professional" scholars. He says of *shalotn shames* "errand-goer, messenger of a town" that he could not work out the meaning of *shalotn* and defines via context (p. 484). At *shmokhn* "rejoice, be radiant with joy" (pp. 507–8), he remarks that "the etymology of the word is unknown to me. The meaning I give according to the context" (see Korman 1954, 56–57, Mark 1954, 60). One even comes across "Ayzik Meyer Dik [the Yiddish novelist] says somewhere" (p. 119).

Harkavy is often castigated for including gender markers for nouns only in the first two pages of the trilingual dictionary. It is the kind of inconsistency that only a lexicographer and *folksmentsh* of his stature could carry off. In his preface, he explains, with his usual down-to-earth honesty, that he could not proceed without being arbitrary and capricious. It is evident, however, from the introduction to the unpublished Yiddish-Yiddish defining dictionary (Harkavy 1931, 290) that he and mainstream Yiddish stylistics were then moving in the same direction. In his unpublished work, the gender problem is remedied in a novel way by offering the user a dual system—either the generally accepted three-gender system of Southern Eastern Yiddish (Mideastern Yiddish, popularly "Polish," plus Southeastern Yiddish, popularly "Ukrainian"), relying upon Lifshits (1869), Birnbaum (1918), and Reyzen (1924); or his native two-gender Northeastern Yiddish (popularly "Lithuanian") system, for the speakers of that dialect.

After completing the *Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary*, Harkavy continued to work on his massive fifty-thousand-word Yiddish-Yiddish defining dictionary. Unlike his previous bilingual and trilingual dictionaries, the *Yidisher folks-verterbukh*, as it was to be called, was envisaged as "a dictionary of Yiddish and for Yiddish. National dictionaries have long been in existence among cultured nations. Now that Yiddish has come to play a self-sufficient

role, the time has come for such a dictionary to be created" (Harkavy 1931, 289). It was near completion when Harkavy published excerpts and a description in 1931. The great work was heralded with joyous anticipation by leaders of Yiddish culture in Warsaw (e.g., *Bikher velt* 1929), Vilna (e.g., YIVO 1934), and in other centers of Yiddish around the world. Let us hope the means will be found to issue it soon.

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