Jewish Languages Past and Present
Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
HIS 510 – Spring 2007, Quad 3
Instructor: Sarah Bunin Benor

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Around the world, wherever Jews have lived, they have distinguished themselves linguistically from their non-Jewish neighbors. They have spoken languages as diverse as Arabic, Spanish, Persian, and English and infused them with distinctly Jewish features, such as Hebrew and Aramaic words and elements of other Jewish languages. This class explores the processes of alignment and distinction that have engendered Jewish language varieties throughout the history of the Diaspora. Students will learn some methodologies and theories of linguistics as they analyze Yiddish, Ladino, Jewish English, Jewish Malayalam, and other Jewish language varieties.

The class will be guided by several questions, including:

- How do Jews distinguish themselves from non-Jews?
- What constitutes a "Jewish language"?
- How do language and culture help to construct identity and maintain community boundaries?
- What are some similarities and differences between Jewish languages in different times and places?
- How have Jewish languages been affected by modernity and the increasing integration of Jews into non-Jewish society?
- How do language varieties of the past compare to the language varieties of contemporary American Jews?

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
Students should become familiar with the history of Jewish languages and issues in Jewish language theory, and they should be able to connect historical findings to contemporary American Jewish language and culture. Students should be able to describe one particular Jewish language variety in depth.

PREREQUISITES:
Reading ability in Hebrew and at least one course in Jewish history. Prior background in linguistics or other languages is not required.

REQUIRED TEXTS:
The Jewish Cultural Tapestry: International Jewish Folk Traditions, by Steven M. Lowenstein, Oxford University Press, 2002.
Course reader, available from University Readers: http://www.universityreaders.com
Online resource: Jewish Language Research Website: http://www.jewish-languages.org

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:
1. Class participation (25%)
   a. Quantity (is the participation frequent enough?)

b. Quality (do the comments show understanding of and engagement with the material?)
c. Evidence of preparation (reading in an engaged way)
d. Overall contribution to the class (not overbearing, not distracted, contributes positively to the class vibe)
2. Presentation (25%)
3. Research paper (6-8 pages) (50%)

CONTACT INFORMATION:
Best way to reach me: e-mail: sbenor@huc.edu.
Office #8 in the basement. Office phone: 213-765-2124.
Office hours: by appointment Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday (don't be shy!).

SCHEDULE

Week 1: January 9
Introduction to the class
Linguistic issues: elements of language, language vs. dialect, language contact, sociolinguistic variation, orthography
Historiography of Jewish languages

Reading:
In preparation for the class, please read all 14 language descriptions on the Jewish Language Research Website: http://www.jewish-languages.org

Week 2: January 16
Overview of Jewish communities and languages around the world and throughout history

Reading:
Lowenstein, Steven M. 2000. *The Jewish Cultural Tapestry: International Jewish Folk Traditions*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1-67.
Spolsky, Bernard and Sarah Bunin Benor. 2006. Jewish Languages. In *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. Keith Brown, ed. 2nd edition. Vol. 6. Oxford: Elsevier. 120-124.

Week 3: January 23
What makes a language Jewish, components of Jewish languages
Come to class with top two choices for presentation/paper topics

Reading:
Rabin, Chaim. 1981. What Constitutes a Jewish Language? *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 30. 19-28.

Weinreich, Max. 1980. *History of the Yiddish Language*. Translated from Yiddish by S.
    Noble and J. Fishman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 166-8, 175-202.

Week 4: January 30
Lashon Kodesh (Hebrew/Aramaic) and Jewish languages

Reading:
Weinreich, Max. 1980. *History of the Yiddish Language*. Translated from Yiddish by S.
    Noble and J. Fishman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 351-4.
Fishman, Joshua. 1985. The Sociology of Jewish Languages from a General
    Sociolinguistic Point of View. In *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages*.
    Joshua Fishman, ed. Leiden: E.J. Brill. 3-20.
Schwarzwald, Ora. 1985. The Fusion of the Hebrew-Aramaic Lexical Component in
    Judeo-Spanish. In *Judeo-Romance Languages*. Isaac Benabu and Joseph Sermoneta,
    eds. Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim. 139-156.
Sabar, Yona. 1999. The Hebrew Elements in Written Jewish Neo-Aramaic Texts. In *Vena
    Hebraica in Judaeorum Linguis: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on
    the Hebrew and Aramaic Elements in Jewish Languages*. Shelomo Morag et al., eds.
    Milan: Centro Studi Camito-Semitici di Milano. 387-391.

Week 5: February 6
Comparative Jewish linguistics
Sample presentation by instructor: Jewish English

Reading:
Bunis, David M. 1981. A Comparative Linguistic Analysis of Judezmo and Yiddish
    International Journal of the Sociology of Language 30. 49-70.
Wexler, Paul. 1981. Jewish Inter-Linguistics: Facts and Conceptual Framework.
    Language 57 (1). 99-145.

Week 6: February 13
Bible and liturgical text translation
Pre-modern vs. modern Jewish languages

Reading:
Hary, B. 2000. Egyptian Judeo-Arabic Sharh - Bridging the Cultures of Hebrew and
    Arabic. In *Judaism and Islam - Boundaries, Communication and Interaction: Essays
    in Honor of William M. Brinner*. Benjamin Hary et al., eds. Leiden: Brill. 395-407.
Jochnowitz, G. 1985. Had Gadya in Judeo-Italian and Shuadit (Judeo-Provençal). In
    Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages. Joshua Fishman, ed. Leiden: Brill.
    241-5.
Lowenstein, Steven M. 2000. *The Jewish Cultural Tapestry: International Jewish Folk
    Traditions*. New York: Oxford University Press. 229-245.

Weintraub, Boris. 2006. "Ladino: The Sweet Language We Did Not Abandon." *Moment* April 2006. 61-64, 75.

Week 7: February 20
Presentations

Reading:
Prager, Leonard. 1986. A Preliminary Checklist of English Names of Jewish Lects. *Jewish Language Review* 6. (skim this).

Paper due February 26 either by hard copy or by e-mail (depending if you'd prefer to receive comments electronically or in writing)

PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

Each student will select a Jewish language and describe it in detail. Possible topics include:
1. Jewish Aramaic
2. Judeo-Arabic
3. Judeo-French
4. Judeo-Greek
5. Judeo-Italian
6. Judeo-Persian
7. Judeo-Portuguese
8. Judeo-Provençal
9. Judeo-Slavic
10. Judeo-Spanish (incl. Judezmo/Ladino, Hakitiya)
11. Languages of Karaite Jews
12. Yiddish
13. Other language variety of your choice (to be approved by instructor)
(Jewish English is not on this list, because it will be discussed in detail in class.)

Format for presentation (15-20 minutes) and paper (6-8 pages):
1. Brief historical overview
    a. relevant migration patterns
    b. periods of the language
    c. documentary evidence
    d. extent of previous research on this language
2. Linguistic components, how important they are in the formation of the language
    a. substrata (previous Jewish languages)
    b. Hebrew/Aramaic
    c. adstrata (new languages in contact)
3. Details on Hebrew/Aramaic component
    a. pronunciation tradition(s) of Whole and Merged Hebrew Elements

        b.   semantic fields of loanwords

        c.   morpho-syntactic integration of loanwords (nouns, verbs, adjectives)

4.   Examples of words

        a.   weddings

        b.   greetings: everyday, Shabbat, holidays

        c.   non-Jews

5.   Orthography

        a.   Hebrew script? If so, representation of vowels, non-Hebrew consonants

        b.   representation of loanwords

6.   Other issues (optional: may not be relevant for all languages)

        a.   Bible and liturgical text translation (include an example)

        b.   secret language

        c.   doublets

        d.   dialects / regional variation

        e.   sociolinguistic variation

        f.   contemporary situation of the language

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON RESERVE IN THE LIBRARY:

Benabu, Isaac and Joseph Sermoneta, eds. 1985. *Judeo-Romance Languages*. Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim.

Biale, David, ed. 2002. *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*. New York: Schocken.

Birnbaum, S. A. 1979. *Yiddish: A Survey and a Grammar*. (See especially Chapter 1: Jewish Languages.)

Cipollone, Nick et al., eds.1998. *Language Files*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Fishman, Joshua. 1985. *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages*. Joshua Fishman, ed. Leiden: Brill.

Gold, David. 1989. *Jewish Linguistic Studies*. Haifa: Association for the Study of Jewish Languages.

Morag, Shelomo et al., eds. 1999. *Vena Hebraica in Judaeorum Linguis: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on the Hebrew and Aramaic Elements in Jewish Languages*. Milan: Centro Studi Camito-Semitici di Milano.

Myhill, John. 2004. *Language in Jewish Society: Toward a New Understanding*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Paper, Herbert, ed. 1978. *Jewish Languages: Theme and Variation*. Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies.

Wardhaugh, Ronald. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Weinreich, Max. 1980. *History of the Yiddish Language*. Translated from Yiddish by S. Noble and J. Fishman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wexler, Paul. 1987. *Explorations in Judeo-Slavic Linguistics*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Wexler, Paul. 1988. *Three Heirs to a Judeo-Latin Legacy: Judeo-Ibero-Romance, Yiddish and Rotwelsch*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Articles:

Birnbaum, S. A. 1971. Jewish Languages. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 10. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 66-69.

Rabin, Chaim. 1979. Haleshonot hayehudiyot: Hameshutaf, hameyuhad, v'haba'ayati. *Pe'amim* 1. 40-66.

Sunshine, Andrew. 1995. History of Jewish Interlinguistics: A Preliminary Outline. In K. R. Jankowsky (ed.), *History of Linguistics* 1993. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 75-82.

Yaeger-Dror, Malcah. 1980. Linguistic Data Solving Social Questions: The Case for (resh) as a Measure of Ethnic Self-Identification. *Israel Social Science Research* 9/1-2. 109-160.