rebbe

Contents

English

Etymology

Borrowed from Yiddish רבי (*rebe*).

Pronunciation

- IPA^(key): /ˈɹɛbi/, /ˈɹɛbə/

Noun

rebbe (*plural* **rebbes**)

1. (*Judaism*) The spiritual leader of a Chassidic Jewish community.

Related terms

- rabbi
- reb
- rebbetzin

Translations

leader of a Chassidic group	[show ▼]

Anagrams

- ebber

West Flemish

Etymology

From Middle Dutch *ribbe*, from Old Dutch **ribba*, from Proto-Germanic **ribjō*.

Pronunciation

- Rhymes: -æːbə
- IPA^(key): /ræːbə/

Noun

rebbe *m*

1. rib

רַבִּי

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Aramaic

Pronunciation

- IPA^(key): /ribi/

Noun

רִבִּי • (ribbī) *m* (*plural* רבנא)

1. rabbi, spiritual teacher
2. master

Hebrew

Etymology

רַב (ráv, "master") + י־ (i, "my")

Noun

רַבִּי • (rabî) *m*

1. rabbi, spiritual teacher

Descendants

- Greek: ραββίνος *m* (ravvínos)

See also

- ר׳
- רב

Yiddish

Etymology

From Hebrew and Aramaic רבי ("rabbi, spiritual teacher").

Noun

רבי • (rebe) *m*, *plural* רביס (rebes) *or* רביים (rabeyem), *accusative and dative* רבין (rebn)

1. (*historical or Hasidic*) rabbi

   איינער האָט ליב דעם רבין און דער אַנדערער די רביצין.

   *eyner hot lib dem **rebn** un der anderer di rebetsin.*
   One man loves the **rabbi** and the other one loves the rebbetzin.

Usage notes

- This is one of the few Yiddish nouns that declines. The accusative and dative are both רבין (rebn).

Derived terms

- רביצין (rebetsin)
- רבינו (rebenyu)

See also

- רב (reb), ר׳ (r')
- הרב (horav)
- ראַבינער (rabiner)
- רב (rov)

Rebbe

Rebbe ([Hebrew](#): רֶבִּי: /ˈrɛbɛ/ or /ˈrɛbi/[1]) is a [Yiddish](#) word derived from the [Hebrew](#) word *rabbi*, which means 'master', 'teacher', or 'mentor'. Like the title *rabbi*, it refers to teachers of [Torah](#) or leaders of [Judaism](#).

In common parlance of modern times, the phrase *the Rebbe* is often used specifically by [Hasidim](#) to refer to the leader of their Hasidic movement.[2][3]

Rebbe Naftali Tzvi Labin of Zidichov

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Terminology and origin

The [Yiddish](#) term *rebbe* comes from the Hebrew word *rabbi*, meaning "My Master", which is the way a student would address a master of Torah. It was an honorific originally given to those who had [Smicha](#) in the [Pharisaic](#) and Talmudic era. Since vowels were not written at the time, it is impossible to know historically whether it was pronounced rah-bee (/ˈrɑːbi/) or r-bee (/ˈrɛbi/). The English word *rabbi* (/ˈræbaɪ/) comes directly from this form. In Yiddish, the word became *reb-eh* (/ˈrɛbɛ/)—now commonly spelled *rebbe* (/ˈrɛbə/—or just *reb* (/ˈrɛb/). The word *master* רַב *rav* [ˈʁäv] literally means "great one".

The Sages of the Mishnah known as the *[Tannaim](#)*, from the 1st and 2nd centuries of the common era, were known by the title *Rabbi* (/ˈræbi/) (for example, [Rabbi Akiva](#) and Rabbi [Shimon bar Yochoy](#)). Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, the leader of Jewry in Mishnaic Times, was simply called *Rabbi* (/ˈræbi/), as being the rabbi par excellence of his generation.

The Sages of the Talmud known as the *[Amoraim](#)*, from the 3rd, 4th and early 5th centuries, those born in the [Land of Israel](#), are called *Rabbi* (/ˈræbi/); those born in the [diaspora](#) are known by the title *Rav* (/ˈrɑːv/).

Usage

Today, *rebbe* is used in the following ways:

1. Rabbi, a teacher of Torah – Yeshiva students or *cheder* (elementary school) students, when talking to their teacher, would address him with the honorific *Rebbe*, as the Yiddish-German equivalent to the Hebrew word Rabbi (רַבִּי *rabi* [ˈʁäbi]).
2. Personal mentor and teacher—A person's main Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva teacher, or mentor, who teaches him or her Talmud and Torah and gives religious guidance, is referred to as *rebbe* (/ˈrɛbə/[1]), also as an equivalent to the term "rabbi".
3. Spiritual leader—The spiritual head of a Hasidic movement is called a *rebbe* (/ˈrɛbə/[1]). His followers would address him as "The *Rebbe*" or refer to him when speaking to others as "the *Rebbe*" or "my *Rebbe*". He is referred to by others as the *Rebbe* of a particular Hasidut. In Hebrew, a hasidic rebbe is often referred to as an *AdMoR*, which is an abbreviation for ***Ad**oneinu, **Mo**reinu, ve**R**abbenu* ("Our Master, our Teacher, and our Rabbi"). In writing, this title is placed before the name of the Hasidut, as in "Admor of Belz"; while the title *Rebbe* comes after the name of the *Hasidut* when used as an adjective, as in "Lubavitcher Rebbe", "Amshinever Rebbe", and every rebbe of every Hasidic Dynasty. In the *Litvishe* world, when not referring to a hasidic *rebbe* (/ˈrɛbə/[1]), the word can be pronounced "rebbee" (/ˈrɛbi/). Sephardic Jews can pronounce it as "Ribbi" (/riːbi/). The Lubavitcher hasidim have a tradition that the Hebrew letters that make up the word rebbe (/ˈrɛbi/) are also an acronym for "**R**osh **B**nei **Y**isroel", meaning "a spiritual head of the Children of Israel".

An ordinary communal rabbi, or *rebbe* in Yiddish, is sometimes distinct from a *rav* (/ˈræv/, also pronounced *rov* /ˈrɒv/ by Jews of Eastern European or Russian origin), who is a more authoritative halakhic decider. A significant function of a *rav* is to answer questions of halakha (corpus of Jewish law), but he is not as authoritative as a *posek*. The short form *reb* is an honorific for Orthodox Jewish men, who are most likely to have profound knowledge of the Talmud and Torah, as opposed to Reconstructionist, Reform or Conservative Judaism. Originally, this title was added to the names of Jews at the time of the schism with the Karaite sect, as a sign of loyalty to the original rabbinic tradition, known today as Orthodox Judaism.[4]

Hasidism

As a rule, among hasidim, *rebbe* (/ˈrɛbə/) is referred to in Hebrew as *admor* (pl. *admorim*), an abbreviation for Hebrew *adoneinu moreinu v'rabeinu*, meaning 'our master, our teacher, and our rabbi', which is now the modern Hebrew word in Israel for *rebbe*.

Hasidim use the term *rebbe* (/ˈrɛbə/) also in a more elevated manner, to denote someone that they perceive not only as the religious leader or *nasi*[3] of their congregation, but as their spiritual adviser and mentor. *The Rebbe* or *my Rebbe* in this sense is a *rav* or *rabbi* whose views and advice are accepted not only on issues of religious law and practice, but in all arenas of life, including political and social issues. Sometimes a hasid has a *rebbe* as his spiritual guide and an additional *rav* for rulings on issues of *halakha*.

Hasidim use the concept of a (non-hasidic) *rebbe* in the simple sense of *rabbi*, as the Yiddish-German equivalent to the Hebrew word רַבִּי *rabi* [ˈʁäbi]. For example: "I will ask my rebbe (/ˈrɛbə/), Rabbi (/ˈræbaɪ/) Ploni (so-and-so), for advice about this personal matter."

The hasidic rebbe

A hasidic rebbe (/ˈrɛbɛ/) is generally taken to mean a great leader of a Hasidic dynasty, also referred to as "Grand Rabbi" in English or an *ADMOR*, a Hebrew acronym for ***Ad**oneinu-**Mo**reinu-ve**R**abbeinu* ("our lord/master, teacher, and rabbi"). Outside of Hasidic circles the term "Grand Rabbi" has been used to refer to a rabbi with a higher spiritual status. The practice became widespread in America in the early 1900s when Hasidic rebbes began to emigrate to the United States and was derived from the German *Grossrabbiner*.

Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, is regarded by Hasidim as the first Hasidic rebbe.[2] During his lifetime he was referred to mainly as "The holy" rather than as "Rebbe", and his disciples were "magidim" or "preachers", such as the Magid of Chernobyl or the Magid of Mezritsh.

The first "rebbe" to be known as such was the Baal Shem Tov's grandson, Rabbi Boruch of Mezhibozh, who was referred to as "The Rebbe" during his lifetime. After him, those who rose to positions of leadership and their successors began to be called *rebbe*. The title gradually came to suggest a higher spiritual status.

Each Hasidic group refers to its leader as "the rebbe".

Hannah Rachel Verbermacher, also known as the Maiden of Ludmir or the "Ludmirer Moyd", was the only female rebbe in the history of the Hasidic movement; she lived in the 19th century in Ukraine and Israel.[5][6]

Relationship of hasidim to their rebbe

Rebbe as tzadik

According to Maimonides,[7] a tzadik is "one whose merit surpasses [his/her] iniquity", and every person can reach the level of a Tzadik. According to the Tanya, a tzadik has no evil inclination, and only a select few predestined to attain this level can attain it. According to Kabbalah (and particularly the hasidic understanding of Kabbalah), the world is sustained on the "shoulders" of Tzadikim Nistarim, divinely predestined exceptionally righteous people in a generation. Nobody has knowledge about who was such a tzaddik, even one of these exceptionally righteous people would not know that they really are such a tzadik. These people are understood to have perfected their personal service of God to such an extent that they become literally and physically aware of God. These righteous people's perception (of both spiritual and physical, not to mention temporal matters) transcends the apparent boundaries of existence.

However, a hasidic rebbe is generally said to be a righteous person, called a "tzaddik".[2] Furthermore, a rebbe is said to be able to affect divine providence, and a rebbe is said to be able to "see the future", or at least have strong insight into the life and trials of another.

As a result, hasidim in some hasidic circles seek their rebbe's advice for a variety of concerns: spiritual, physical, and even business concerns. Furthermore, many people seek the blessing *(bracha)* of a rebbe (and a hasid will specifically seek the blessing of his own rebbe) for anything from minor (and all the more so major) physical troubles, to grand spiritual concerns. Many famous and common stories of a rebbe's intervention involve women who successfully seek a rebbe's blessing for fertility so that they can conceive after having been barren for many years.

Tzadik HaDor

In some movements the hasidim believe that their rebbe is the "*tzadik hador*" (tzaddik of the generation) and would regard any thought that detracts from his perfection and holiness as heresy. Other sects lessen this idealization to some degree or another. Since many rebbes are sons-in-law or students of other rebbes, it makes sense that they would view themselves as subordinate to those other rebbes. Nonetheless, their hasidim remain loyal to them because of their special loyalty, a family connection, or a belief that a specific *tzaddik* or Nasi HaDor (although others might have greater spiritual stature) connects best with one's soul. For example, the Kosover Rebbe makes yearly pilgrimages to the Tosher Rebbe. Nonetheless, his followers remain very loyal to him.

Kabbalah describes an extension of Moses in each generation, alternately identified with the *Tzadik of the generation*, and the potential Jewish Messiah of the generation. In Hasidism, each person's soul essence relates to the level of Moses.

Rebbe as conduit

Unlike rabbis or non-hasidic rebbes in other Jewish movements, hasidic Judaism considers a 'hasidic rebbe' to be a conduit between Jews and God.[2] On the basis of traditional Kabbalistic concepts and terminology, Hasidic philosophy bridged deveikut, a Jewish concept referring to closeness to God, to the hasidic rebbe, embodying and channeling the Divine flow of blessing to the world, because Creation is dependent on the continuous flow of Divine lifeforce, without which it would revert to nothingness.[8]

Hasidic followers of a rebbe

Given a rebbe's physical awareness of God, and the rebbe's transcendent perception of Godliness, many hasidim take special care to observe the specific and sometimes minute practices of their rebbe. Even things that seem mundane may nonetheless be seen by hasidim as incredibly significant. For example, Lubavitcher hasidim frequently shape their fedoras to match the way that the Lubavitcher Rebbe shaped his hat-which was more flat than many others. Many Skverer hasidim (of the Skverer Rebbe in New Square) wear their peyos identical to those of the Skverer Rebbe. While hasidim do not always follow the specific practices of their rebbe, the rebbe is able to create practices that may be specific and unique to his hasidim. For example, Rabbi Aaron Roth (*Reb Areleh*, as he was called) the first rebbe of Shomer Emunim, told his hasidim to pause frequently while eating their meals in order to keep them from overindulging. A hasid will usually love his rebbe like a close family member, if not more so. The degree and nature of this belief varies, however, depending on the movement.

Functions of a hasidic rebbe

There are some functions which are exclusively the domain of hasidic rebbes:

- Reading *kvitlach*
- Running a *tish* or leading a *farbrengen*

Others are not exclusive to Hasidic rebbes, but are often an important part of their role:

- Participating in family celebrations of the hasidim, such as weddings and *brisim* (circumcision ceremony)
- Performing mitzvos, etc. in the presence of their hasidim, such as kindling the Chanuka lights and drawing water with which to bake matzos
- Leading the prayers on Shabbos, Holy Days, and other special occasions
- Delivering learned or inspirational discourses (in Chabad Hasidut, this is one of the main roles of a rebbe)
- Build educational, social and religious institutions[9]

Kvitlach

A rebbe has times when Hasidim (and other petitioners) may come for a private audience. A kvitel (Yiddish for "note", plural *kvitlach*) is a note with the name of the petitioner and a short request for which the rebbe is asked to pray. The formula in which a person's name is written is one's own Hebrew name, the son/daughter of one's mother's Hebrew name, such as *Shimon ben Rivkah* (Simeon the son of Rebecca). Hasidim believe that rebbes read supernaturally "between the lines" of a *kvitel*, and in every Hasidic movement there are numerous anecdotes relating how the rebbe saw things that were not written in the *kvitel*. In most Hasidic groups, the *kvitel* is written by the rebbe's *gabbai* (secretary), however sometimes the petitioner writes it on his own. Usually, but with some exceptions, a *pidyon* (redemption) of cash is customarily handed to the rebbe under the *kvitel*, but this is not obligatory. This is considered to be the conduit through which the blessing is given, and a redemption for the soul of the petitioner. ("A gift makes its receiver glad" is given as an explanation: a blessing only comes from a joyous heart.) It is also customary to tip the gabbai, although this too is not obligatory.

Tish and farbrengen

A rebbe conducts a *tish* (Yiddish: פירט טיש: *feert tish*, literally, "to run [a] table") or a *farbrengen*—a communal festive meal with highly mystical overtones—on Shabbat and other occasions. At a tish, the rebbe distributes *shirayim* (lit. remnants) to the Hasidim seated at or gathered round the table. When a gathering similar to a *tish* is led by a rabbi who is not a rebbe, it can be referred to as a *botte* (esp. amongst groups from Romania) or *sheves achim*.

See also

- Hasidic philosophy
- Hasidic Judaism
- List of Hasidic dynasties

The Bostoner Rebbe *feert tish*, lit. "runs [a] table" in his synagogue in Beitar Illit

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4. Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *Halikhot Shlomo* 1:370–373; Salo Wittmayer Baron *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 5 p. 283

5. "YIVO - Maiden of Ludmir" (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Maiden_of_Ludmir) *www.yivoencyclopedia.org*. Retrieved 1 May 2018.

6. Deutsch, Nathaniel (6 October 2003). "The Maiden of Ludmir: A Jewish Holy Woman and Her World" (https://books.google.com/books?id=K4WylwfJNOoC&dq=biography+maiden+ludmir&source=gbs_navlinks_s). University of California Press. Retrieved 1 May 2018 – via Google Books.

7. Tractate Yevamot of the Babylonian Talmud 49b–50a: "One whose merit surpasses his iniquity is a *zadik*". Mishneh Torah, *Sefer Madda*, Laws of Repentance 3:1

8. *God and the Zaddik as the two focal points of Hasidic worship*, Ada Rapoport-Albert, in *Essential Papers on Hasidism* edited by Gershon Hundert, NYU Press 1991

9. "Vienna Celebrates 'the Most Influential Rabbi of Modern History'". Alexandria, VA. Connection Newspapers. May 7, 2014. "Chabad Tysons Jewish Center will present Paradigm Shift: Transformational Life Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, a new six-session course by the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute. The course will be offered as part of a series of local activities in Northern Virginia marking 20 years since the passing of "the Rebbe", Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson of righteous memory. The Rebbe was a visionary religious leader who inspired countless individuals during his lifetime and established a global network of educational, social, and religious institutions to revive the post-holocaust Jewish landscape".

External links

- Over 1,000 videos of rebbes
- The Role of a Rebbe and the Rebbe-Chossid Relationship
- Torah sources about the concept of a rebbe

Yiddish orthography

Yiddish orthography is the writing system used for the Yiddish language. It includes Yiddish spelling rules and the Hebrew script, which is used as the basis of a full vocalic alphabet. Letters that are silent or glottal stops in the Hebrew language are used as vowels in Yiddish. Other letters that can serve as both vowels and consonants are either read as appropriate to the context in which they appear or are differentiated by diacritical marks derived from the Hebrew *nikud*, commonly referred to as "points". Additional phonetic distinctions between letters that share the same base character are also indicated by pointing or by the adjacent placement of otherwise silent base characters. Several Yiddish points are not commonly used in any present-day Hebrew context and others are used in a manner that is specific to Yiddish orthography. There is significant variation in the way this is applied in literary practice. There are also several differing approaches to the disambiguation of characters that can be used as either vowels or consonants.

Words of Aramaic and Hebrew origin are normally written in the traditional orthography of the source language—i.e., the orthography of these words, which is consonant-based, is generally preserved (Niborski 2012). All other Yiddish words are represented with a phonemic orthography. Both forms can appear in a single word—for example, where a Yiddish affix is applied to a Hebrew stem. Yiddish pointing may also be applied to words that are otherwise written entirely with traditional orthography

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Reform and standardisation

In the early 20th century, for both cultural and political reasons, efforts were initiated toward the development of a uniform Yiddish orthography. A specimen initial practice was described in detail by the Yiddish lexicographer Alexander Harkavy in a *Treatise on Yiddish Reading, Orthography, and Dialectal Variations* first published in 1898 together with his Yiddish-English Dictionary (Harkavy 1898), and available online (beginning with the section headed *Yiddish reading*). Additional illustrations of this variation are provided in source excerpts in Fishman 1981, which also contains a number of texts specifically about the need (pro and con) for a uniform orthography. A detailed chronology of the major events during this normative action, including rosters of conference participants, bibliographic references to the documents they produced, and summaries of their contents, is given in Yiddish in Schaechter 1999. There is a less detailed (but extensive nonetheless) English language review of this process in Estraikh 1999.

Traditional
orthography

Soviet
orthography

The first action formally undertaken by a government was in the Soviet Union in 1920, abolishing the separate etymological orthography for words of Semitic (i.e., Hebrew and Aramaic) origin. This was extended twelve years later with the elimination of the five separate final-form consonants (as indicated in the table below) which were, however, widely reintroduced in 1961. The changes are both illustrated in the way the name of the author Sholem Aleichem is written. His own work uses the form שלום־עליכם but in Soviet publication this is respelled phonetically to שאָלעמ־אלייכעמ also dispensing with the separate final-form *mem* and using the initial/medial form instead. This can be seen, together with a respelling of the name of the protagonist of his Tevye der milkhiker (originally טביה, changed to טעוויע), by comparing the title pages of that work in the U.S. and Soviet editions illustrated next to this paragraph. Note also the Germanized מילכיגער (*milkhiger*) in the former exemplifying another widespread trend, *daytshmerish*, discussed further below

The efforts preliminary to the 1920 reform, which took place in several countries — most notably in Poland with focus on a uniform school curriculum — resulted in other devices that were not implemented as a result of any governmental mandate. These were further considered during the 1930s by the *Yidisher visnshaftlekher institut* YIVO (YIVO 1930). This led to the development of their תקנות פון ייִדישן אויסלייג (*takones fun yidishn oysleyg* - "Rules of Yiddish Orthography"), also known as the "SYO" (*Standard Yiddish Orthography*) or the "YIVO Rules" (1st edition YIVO 1935, current edition SYO 1999). This has become the most frequently referenced such system in present-day use. Although it regularly figures in pedagogical contexts, it would be misleading to suggest that it is similarly dominant elsewhere. Other orthographies are frequently encountered in contemporary practice and are house standards for many publishers.

A useful review of this variation is provided in the Oxford University כלל־תקנות פון ייִדישן אויסלייג (*klal takones fun yidishn oysleyg* - "Standard Rules of Yiddish Orthography") (Oxford 1992 and available online), written in and codifying a more conventional orthography than the one put forward by YIVO. Differences in the systems can be seen simply by comparing the titles of the two documents but they differ more fundamentally in their approaches to the prescription and description of orthographic detail. The former treats orthographic variation as a positive attribute of the Yiddish literature and describes essential elements of that variation. The latter presents a uniform Yiddish orthography, based on observed practice but with proactive prescriptive intent. Strong difference of opinion about the relative merit of the two approaches has been a prominent aspect of the discussion from the outset and shows little sign of abating. Although the Yiddish alphabet as stated in the SYO is widely accepted as a baseline reference (with a few minor but frequently encountered variations), the spelling rules and the phonetic aspects of the YIVO system of romanized transliteration discussed below, remain subjects of particular contention. The intent of the SYO is not to describe the spectrum of traditional orthographic practice. The bulk of Yiddish literature predates the formulation of those rules and the discrepancies are significant.

Transliteration

A few Yiddish letters and letter combinations are pronounced quite differently in the various Yiddish dialects. Whatever impact this may have on the discussion of standardized orthography, it becomes a significant factor when Yiddish is transliterated into other scripts. It is entirely possible to assign a specific character or sequence of characters in, for example, the Roman alphabet to a specific character or character sequence in the Yiddish alphabet. The transliterated form will, however, be pronounced in a manner that appears natural to the reader. A choice therefore needs to be made about which of the several possible pronunciations of the Yiddish word is to be conveyed prior to its transliteration, with parallel attention to the phonemic attributes of the target language.

The romanization of Yiddish has been a focus of scholarly attention in Europe since the early 16th century. A detailed review of the various systems presented through the 17th century, including extensive source excerpts, is provided in Frakes 2007. The Harkavy treatise cited above describes a late 19th-century system that is based on the pronunciation of the Northeastern Yiddish dialect, Litvish, for an anglophone audience. This was also a mainstay of the standardization efforts of YIVO, resulting in the romanization

system described in detail below. The Harkavy and YIVO initiatives provide a convenient framework within which intervening developments may be considered. There was significant debate about many aspects of that sequence, including the need for any form of standardized orthography at all (Fishman 1981).

The outright replacement of Hebrew script with Roman script in the native representation of written Yiddish was briefly considered. This had no impact on mainstream orthography but a number of Yiddish books are currently available in romanized editions. These include Yiddish dictionaries, a context in which consistent and phonetically tenable transliteration is essential.

There is no general agreement about the transliteration of Hebrew into the Roman alphabet. The Hebrew component of a Yiddish text will normally reflect the transliterator's preference without being seen as a component of the methodology applied to the romanization of words presented in the phonemic orthography.

Transcription

A transliteration system uses one script to represent another as closely as possible. It will normally permit unambiguous conversion back and forth between the two scripts. Where the intent is to indicate phonetic variation, some form of transcription will be required. This is frequently done by using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). There are also many contexts in which phonetic distinctions are indicated by the diacritical marking of the base characters, or through the similar use of some alternate script that is familiar to the intended audience. These approaches are all also seen in native Yiddish texts, where distinctions that cannot be directly represented with the basic Yiddish script but do need to be highlighted, are indicated by using additional Hebrew diacritical marks, with Roman letters, or with the IPA.

There is no intrinsic reason why a transcription scheme cannot also be used for transliteration. In general, however, there is no expectation that the representation of a word in the source script can be retrieved from a transcription. Its purpose is to indicate how a word is pronounced, not its native orthography.

The table in the following section indicates two alternatives each for romanized transliteration and phonetic transcription. It is keyed to the Yiddish character repertoire as codified by YIVO. Other transliteration systems are also regularly employed in a variety of contexts but no single one of them represents the full range of variant pronunciation in Yiddish dialects. Nor is the YIVO system equally appropriate phonetically to all languages using Roman script. This issue becomes particularly intricate when dealing with older texts where little is known about pronunciation, and transmitting the fullest possible detail of their notation is historically important. There are several approaches to the romanization of such material. The YIVO transliteration system is solely intended to serve as an English-oriented phonetic counterpart to the modern Standard Yiddish described (and to some extent prescribed) in the SYO. That work does, however, consider the transcription of variant pronunciation as will be discussed below.

YIVO published a major study of the range of Yiddish phonetic variation in *The Language and Cultural Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry*, commonly referred to as the LCAAJ. This uses a detailed system of marked Roman characters and suprasegmental marks to indicate that variation, and does not apply standard YIVO transliteration at all. Although the full phonetic transcription scheme is not amenable to presentation in the table below, its core elements have been included. This scheme has been used by later authors to indicate "phonetic transcription" and is labelled in that manner here. One recent example of this is provided in Jacobs 2005. Another transcription system frequently cited in academic contexts was devised and presented (in German) by Solomon Birnbaum in Birnbaum 1918 and used in his later German works, as well as his English publication Birnbaum 1979. This was intended to provide extreme flexibility in the representation of differences between dialects but failed to gain further practical acceptance due to its intricacy and idiosyncratic appearance (illustrated by Birnbaum's own transcription of a passage from Sholem Aleichem's, *Shprintse*: "*Vaaihii haaiym, tréft zex a maasy, éiryv śvjjys iz dus gyvéin, kjm ex cj fuurn mit a bisl milexiks cj ainy fjn maany koinytys, a ijngy almuuny jn a raaxy fjn iékaterinoslav, vus is gykjmyn cj fuurn mit ir ziindl, aronćik haist er, kain boiberik ifn zjmer*", which in YIVO transliteration is, "*Vayehi hayoym, treft zikh a mayse, erev-shvues iz dos geven, kum ikh tsu forn mit a bisel milkhigs tsu eyner fun mayne kundes, a yunge almone un a raykhe fun katerineslav, vos iz gekumen tsu forn mit ihr zundl, arontshik heyst er, keyn boyberik oyfn zumer*").

The Yiddish alphabet

This table lists the Yiddish alphabet as described in the Uriel Weinreich *English–Yiddish–English Dictionary* (Weinreich 1968), with a few variants that may be seen in readily available literature. The YIVO romanizations are taken from the same source, where they are presented as "sound equivalents". The romanizations indicated in Harkavy 1898 are included for comparison. The IPA transcriptions correspond to the examples provided by YIVO[1] (with a few additional variants). The transcriptions in the following column were extrapolated from the LCAAJ. It is important to note that the elements of the two transcription systems appear in this table as appropriate to the standard pronunciation discussed under the next heading. The same elements, particularly those indicating vowels and diphthongs, are associated with other Yiddish letters when other pronunciations are being transcribed.

The table also includes several digraphs and a trigraph that are standard elements of the Yiddish writing system. They appear here in normal alphabetic order but are commonly collated separately at the end of a listing of the basic single-character alphabet.

Symbol	YIVO Romanization	Harkavy Romanization	IPA Transcription	LCAAJ Transcription	Name	Notes
א	(none)				*shtumer* <u>*alef*</u>	Indicates that a syllable starts with the vocalic form of the following letter. Neither pronounced nor transcribed.
אַ	a				*pasekh alef*	As a non-YIVO equivalent, an [a] may also be indicated by an unpointed *alef*.
אָ	o		ɔ	o	*komets alef*	As a non-YIVO equivalent, an [o] may also be indicated by an unpointed *alef*.
ב	b				<u>*beys*</u>	
בּ	(none)		b	(b)	*beys*	Non-YIVO alternative to ב.
בֿ	v				*veys*	Only used in words of Semitic origin.
ג	g				<u>*giml*</u>	
ד	d				<u>*daled*</u>	
דזש	dzh	(none)	d͡ʒ	dž	*daled zayen shin*	
ה	h				<u>*hey*</u>	
ו	u		ʊ	u	<u>*vov*</u>	
וּ	u	(none)	ʊ	u	*melupm vov*	Only used adjacent to ו or before י.
וֹ	(none)		ɔ, ɔj	(o,oj)	*khoylem*	Non-YIVO alternative to אָ and וי.
װ	v				*tsvey vovn*	
וי	oy	oi	ɔj	oj	*vov yud*	
ז	z				<u>*zayen*</u>	
זש	zh		ʒ	ž	*zayen shin*	
ח	kh	ch	x		<u>*khes*</u>	Only used in words of Semitic origin.
ט	t				<u>*tes*</u>	

Letter					Name	Notes
ט						
טש	tsh		t͡ʃ	č	*tes shin*	
י	y, i		j, i	j, i	*yud*	Consonantal [j] when the first character in a syllable. Vocalic [i] otherwise.
ִי	i	(none)	i		*khirik yud*	Only used following a consonantal י or adjacent to another vowel.
יי	ey	ei, ai	ɛj	ej	*tsvey yudn*	
ײַ	ay	(none)	aj		*pasekh tsvey yudn*	
כּ	k				*kof*	Only used in words of Semitic origin.
כ	kh	ch	x		*khof*	
ך					*lange khof*	Final form. Only used at the end of a word.
ל	l		l, ʎ	l	*lamed*	
מ	m				*mem*	
ם					*shlos mem*	Final form. Only used at the end of a word.
נ	n				*nun*	
ן	n, m		n, ŋ, m	n, m	*lange nun*	Final form. Only used at the end of a word.
ס	s				*samekh*	
ע	e		ɛ, ə	e	*ayin*	
פּ	p				*pey*	Has no separate final form.
פֿ	f				*fey*	
פ	(none)		f	(f)	*fey*	Non-YIVO alternative to פֿ.
ף	f				*lange fey*	Final form. Only used at the end of a word.
	ts	tz	ts	c	*tsadek*	

Symbol				Name	Note
צ					
ץ				*lange tsadek*	Final form. Only used at the end of a word.
ק	k			*kuf*	
ר	r	R	r	*reysh*	
ש	sh	ʃ	š	*shin*	
שׂ	s			*sin*	
ת	t			*tof*	Only used in words of Semitic origin.
ת	s			*sof*	

The Standard Yiddish Orthography

The SYO is presented in Yiddish, and a few romanized transcriptions are included only where needed to indicate variant pronunciation. Given that the YIVO standardization initiative has been severely criticized for failing to accommodate such variation, it may be worth noting that the SYO explicitly references the three major branches of Eastern Yiddish — *Litvish* (Northern), *Poylish* (Central), and *Ukrainish* (Southern), as developed in the regions centered on present-day Lithuania/Belarus, Poland, and Ukraine/Moldova. The SYO gives dialect-specific romanized equivalents for the following characters:

Symbol	Litvish	Poylish	Ukrainish	Name
ו	u	i	i	*vov*
וו	ej	aj	ej	*tsvey yudn*
וו̣	aj	ā	aj	*pasekh tsvey yudn*

A few further romanized equivalents are provided but do not indicate dialectal differences. These are identical to what is contained in the table in the preceding section, with the following exceptions:

Symbol	Romanization	Name	Note
כ	ch, x, [kh]	*khof*	kh is not included in earlier SYO editions
ש	š	*shin*	

YIVO took Litvish as the standard dialect with only slight modification, to a large extent because of the consistency with which its phonemic attributes could be represented by a standardized orthography similarly requiring only minimal elaboration of traditional practice. The important distinctions between Litvish, Poylish, and Ukrainish are therefore not indicated in either the SYO or Weinreich dictionary. These are, however, discussed in detail in the LCAAJ to which Uriel Weinreich was a major contributor. The Roman characters appearing in the SYO correspond to those used in the LCAAJ, and their marking according to Central European

orthographic convention provides greater flexibility in notating dialectal distinction than does an English-oriented approach. Phonetic transcription is therefore common in linguistic discourse about Yiddish, often using a wide range of diacritical marks in clear contrast to the totally undecorated YIVO romanization.

The SYO listing of the Yiddish alphabet (which predates the Weinreich dictionary) explicitly states that the vowels with combining points, and the *vov* and *yud* digraphs, are not counted as separate letters, nor are the additional consonant digraphs and trigraphs listed at all:

דער סדר פֿון אותיות אין אַלף־בית איז אַזאַ: א, ב, בֿ, ג, ד, ה, ו, ז, ח, ט, י, כּ, כ (ך), ל, מ (ם), נ (ן), ס, ע, פּ, פֿ (ף), צ (ץ), ק, ר, ש, שׂ, תּ, ת

אַ, אָ, וּ, וו, וי, יִ, יי, ײַ רעכענען זיך ניט פֿאַר קיין באַזונדערע אותיות אין אַלף־בית

The order of the letters in the alphabet is as follows [from right to left]:

א, ב, בֿ, ג, ד, ה, ו, ז, ח, ט, י, כּ, כ (ך), ל, מ (ם), נ (ן), ס, ע, פּ, פֿ (ף), צ (ץ), ק, ר, ש, שׂ, תּ, ת

ײַ, יי, יִ, וי, וו, וּ, אָ, אַ *are not counted as separate letters in the alphabet.*

Common variation

There are several areas in which Yiddish orthographic practice varies. One of them is the extent to which pointing is used to avoid ambiguity in the way a word may be read. This ranges from unpointed text, through a small number of pointed characters, to the redundant use of the full system of Hebraic vowel pointing. Text being prepared for print generally uses a certain amount of pointing. In other contexts, however, there is an increasing tendency to forgo it entirely.

The most frugal application of pointing is the distinction of *pey* and *fey* by enclosing a dot in the former (further details below). Immediately beyond that is the differentiation of the *komets alef* from the unpointed form and then the further use of the *pasekh alef*. Where additional points are applied, there can be significant variation in their number and disposition and there are often internal inconsistencies in a single system. (The belief that this variation was an impediment to the recognition of Yiddish as a literary peer to the other major European languages was a primary driving force toward the development of orthographic norms.)

A detailed generalized description of the pointing of Yiddish text is given in Harkavy 1898 and the topic is also treated briefly in the SYO (which otherwise simply declares the prescribed characters). A more extensive character repertoire is presented and discussed in Birnbaum 1918.

Although consonants are basically represented in the same manner, the indication of vowels differs more widely. One noteworthy situation that does pertain to the representation of consonants is the indication of phonetic distinctions between each of the four character pairs *beys/veys*, *kof/khof*, *pey/fey*, and *tof/sof*. The 'hard' (plosive) pronunciation of the first letter in each pair is unequivocally denoted by a dot (*dagesh*) in the middle of the letter. The 'soft' (fricative) pronunciation is similarly notated with a horizontal bar over the letter (*rafe*). Most orthographic

Yiddish transliteration of text on bus stop signs in Kiryas Joel, New York. This is completely unpointed; for example *stop* is written סטאפ rather than סטאָפּ.

systems usually only point one of the two characters in a pair but may be inconsistent from pair to pair in indicating the hard or soft alternative. Text that otherwise conforms to the SYO therefore frequently omits the *rafe* from *fey*, in harmonization with its unpointed

final form, and makes the contrastive distinction from a *pey* solely with a *dagesh* in the latter (פ פּ). The similar avoidance of the *rafe* and preferential use of the *dagesh* is a common alternative for the contrastive distinction between *beys* and *veys* (ב בּ), although in Yiddish, because *beys* is used much more than *veys*, with *veys* limited to words of Semitic origin, the *dagesh* is avoided and *rafe* used instead.

The *rafe* is an attribute of earlier Yiddish orthographic tradition and the *dagesh* is an adaptation of what is more generally a Hebrew practice. This also applies to the alternatives for indicating the distinction between *yud* when used as a consonant or as a vowel. There is a related need for marking the boundary between a *yud* and *tsvey yudn* where they appear adjacent to each other and, again, in the corresponding situation with *vov* and *tsvey vovn*. A dot under a *yud* (*khirik yud*) and to the left of a *vov* (*melupm vov*) unambiguously indicates the vocalic form of those letters. Harkavy does not use these pointed forms in the main table above, being among the details codified in the early 20th century. In the traditional Yiddish orthographies where these letters are not pointed, the vowel is indicated by preceding it with a *shtumer alef* (reducing the use of which was a major focus of the normative efforts). The single and digraph forms of, for example, *vov* can be separated either with a dot or an embedded *alef* as וּוו or וואו (*vu* - "where"). Although only the former spelling is consistent with the SYO and appears in Uriel Weinreich's dictionary, he uses the unpointed alternative exclusively in his own "Say it in Yiddish" (ISBN 0-486-20815-X), a phrase book that contains the word in a large number of "Where is...?" queries and was published when the rules had already been well established.

A further graphic example of this distinction is seen in the official announcement, on 14 November 1997, of a change in editorial policy for the prominent Yiddish periodical, פֿאָרווערטס (*forverts* - "Yiddish Forward"). It was first during that year that they adopted the YIVO orthography. The previous editorial position overtly opposed any such change and the following is included in the explanation of the shift (quoted in full in Schaechter 1999, p. 109):

> און דערנאָך האָבן מיר באַזייַטיקט דעם אלף אין די ווערטער ייד און יידיש (פֿריִער איד און אידיש), ייִנגל (פֿריִער אינגל); און איצט וועלן די ווערטער געשריבן ווערן מיט אַ חיריק אונטערן צווייטן יוד, ווי: ייִד, ייִדיש, ייִנגל
>
> And then we removed the *alef* in the words ייד [*yid*] and יידיש [*yidish*] (previously איד and אידיש) and ייִנגל [*yingl*] (previously אינגל), and now will spell the words with a *khirik* under the second *yud* as: ייִד, ייִדיש and ייִנגל.

The appearance of three alternate spellings for the name of the Yiddish language in a statement intended to describe its orthographic standardization might not require any comment if it were not for the clear indication that the cardinal representation ייִדיש — was neither the older nor the newer editorial preference. Regardless of the intent of that statement, a word-initial *yud* is consonantal and an adjacent *yud* is vocalic in all Yiddish orthographic systems, as is the constraint on a word initial *tsvey yudn* diphthong. Pointing the second *yud* in ייִדיש is therefore, indeed, redundant. The spelling אידיש also illustrates some of the dialectic breadth of the Yiddish language, the name of which is both written and pronounced with and without an initial consonant. It may also be useful to note that in earlier texts, a single *vov* in word-initial position was often used to indicate /f/.

Finally, letters other than *shtumer alef* may be used as silent indications of syllable boundaries and in compound consonants, as well as for extending the length of an adjacent vowel. This became particularly common in deliberately Germanized orthographies dating from the late 19th century, collectively termed *daytshmerish*. Its most obvious further attributes are the heavy use of double consonants where traditional orthography uses single ones, and the gratuitous substitution of German vocabulary for established Yiddish words. The desire to reverse that trend was another of the reasons for the effort toward orthographic standardization.

Publishers of Yiddish newspapers have, however, been particularly conservative in their attitude toward that development and the preceding editorial statement in *Forverts* provides a useful capsule summary of the details about which opinions differed. Other current Yiddish newspapers and magazines retain the spelling אידיש and many elements of *daytshmerish*. This is typified in דער איד ("Der Yid"), which is one of several weekly tabloids — others being דער בלאַט ("Der Blatt") and די צייטונג (*di tsaytung* - "News Report") — that all adhere to the earlier orthography and are in wider circulation and of substantially greater

length than the broadsheet *Forverts*. It may also be seen in the online version of the אַלגעמײַנער זשורנאַל (*algemeyner zhurnal* - Algemeiner Journal), as well as in its printed edition. Extensive additional source material relevant to the stance of the daily press on orthographic reform is provided in Fishman 1981.

Editorial acceptance of varying orthographies is a general characteristic of Hasidic publication, and a single work written by multiple authors may differ in that regard from section to section depending on the preferences of the individual contributors or the typographic context. One example of the latter situation is the use of the pointed forms of *alef* only in specific instances where they are deemed necessary to avoid misreading. (As may be noted with the preceding discussion of the spelling of ײדיש, and the pointing of both *fey* and *pey*, the SYO contains some redundant elements.) The online manifestation of such orthographic heterogeneity can readily be seen in the Yiddish Wikipedia. This is an expansive aspect of contemporary Yiddish publication and will require detailed accommodation in future codifications of orthographic practice.

Graphic innovation

Orthographic reform as considered here, embraces two distinct actions. The first is concerned with the way Yiddish words are spelled, as illustrated in the preceding section with the name of the language itself. The second relates to the graphic devices used to distinguish, for example, between א when representing what in English is an /a/ and when representing an /o/. The pointed אַ and אָ came into use for that purpose in the mid-18th century and were thus well established by the time the 20th century reforms were initiated, as were several other traditional Yiddish pointings. The most deeply entrenched of these was the distinction between פ *fey* and פּ *pey*. YIVO proposed the additional use of pointed letters that were not in the Yiddish (or Hebrew) fonts of the day. This is a frequently cited reason for the SYO being slow to gain acceptance, but regardless of any opinion about their utility, most of the graphic elements introduced in that manner are now readily available. (The SYO explicitly states that pointing to disambiguate vowels does not change the identity of the base character; a pointed alef, for example, is not a letter of its own.)

The first edition of the SYO was preceded by a collection of essays published by YIVO in 1930 entitled, "A Standard of Yiddish Spelling; Discussion No. 1" (דער אײנהײטלעכער ייִדישער אױסלײג — *der eynheytlekher yidisher oysleyg*, YIVO 1930). Neither the title of this work, nor its contents, were written using the conventions that YIVO was subsequently to put forward on its basis. The pivotal essay in the 1930 collection was written by Max Weinreich. His, "A Projected Uniform Yiddish Orthography" (Weinreich 1930), was not written with the pointing that was to be prescribed in the SYO and introduces a character that was entirely absent from the previous repertoire. This is the V-shaped grapheme on the second line of that text, replacing the *tsvey vovn* in Weinreich's name, and in the name of the city where the work was published, Vilna. It appears at numerous additional places in the text and in two other essays in the same collection but did not appear in any subsequent printed work. It was, however, included in the SYO as a recommendation for use in handwritten text, where it is also encountered. Yudl Mark, who authored one of the other 1930 essays in which the typeset form was used, was later to dub this character the *shpitsik maksl* ("acute Maxy"), and it remains enshrined in the YIVO logotype.

Further orthographic variation is seen in other YIVO publications from the same period, also using markings that were not included in the SYO, but which did have typographic precedent (for example, אֶ to represent /e/). The way in which the *pasekh tsvey yudn* are set in the heading of the Weinreich article (in his name) is discussed below.

Computerized text production

There are orthographic alternatives in the digital representation of Yiddish text that may not be visually apparent but are of crucial importance to computer applications that compare two sequences of characters to determine if they match exactly. Examples of this are database queries and spell checkers. Situations where differing representations of typographically similar characters can give unexpected or incorrect results are described below. This may prove a particular concern for Internet users as Yiddish is increasingly used in Internationalized Domain Names and in Web and e-mail addresses.

Some mobile clients only provide limited support for typing pointed text, restricting the range of available characters for such things as instant messaging and other forms of spontaneous digital text. Even people who are skilled in using laptop or desktop keyboards for that purpose (which also requires some erudition) are subject to this constraint. This fuels the move toward unpointed text and is

illustrated in the blog, Yiddish with an alef. This is of particular note given the late acceptance of the SYO by its parent publication, The Jewish Daily Forward, discussed below.

There are also problems specific to the display of pointed Hebrew text in Wikipedia articles. These are discussed in detail at Wikipedia:Niqqud.

Digraphs

There are two different ways in which each of the digraphs *tsvey vovn, vov yud,* and *tsvey yudn* can be typed on Yiddish and Hebrew keyboards (which are both commonly used for the production of Yiddish text). If the digraph appears on a single key, as is normal in a Yiddish keyboard layout, pressing that key will produce a single-character ligature. In the Unicode code chart the HEBREW LIGATURE YIDDISH DOUBLE VAV appears in position U+05F0, the HEBREW LIGATURE YIDDISH VAV YOD at U+05F1, and the HEBREW LIGATURE YIDDISH DOUBLE YOD at U+05F2 (where the "U+" indicates that the numerical position of the character in the Unicode chart is given by following four hexadecimal digits).

These ligatures are, however, frequently missing from Hebrew keyboards — a characteristic inherited from the similarly differentiated Yiddish and Hebrew typewriter layouts. A separate *vov yud* was, however, not provided on either. Hebrew typewriters were modified specifically for Yiddish by the replacement of the first two keys in the second row, which were used for punctuation marks, with one shifting key for "*tsvey yudn/tsvey vovn*" and another for "*komets alef/pey*" (with *dagesh*). This can be seen on a typewriter that belonged to the Yiddish author Isaac Bashevis Singer[1]. Typewriters built directly for Yiddish include the same four additional characters in different positions, as can be seen on another typewriter that belonged to Singer [2]. The salient difference between the two designs is that each key on the Yiddish typewriter produces one character only, available in two different sizes through shifting.

As a result of the widespread practice of writing Yiddish on Hebrew keyboards and other legacy effects of the variant digraph forms on both modified Hebrew and native Yiddish typewriters, when Yiddish text is entered from a computer keyboard with single-key digraphs, many people nonetheless type the digraphs as two-key combinations, giving the corresponding two-letter sequences (*tsvey vovn* U+05D5 U+05D5; *vov yud* U+05D5 U+05D9; *tsvey yudn* U+05D9 U+05D9). Although ligatures can be appropriate in monospaced typewritten text, other than in the smallest type sizes they rarely appear in proportional typesetting, where the elements of a digraph are normally letterspaced as individual characters (illustrated in Max Weinreich's name in the facsimile text in the preceding section). It may be of further interest to note that a useful, albeit highly colloquial, test of whether digraphs are regarded as single or double characters is provided by the way they appear in crossword puzzles In Yiddish, each element of a digraph is written in its own square (and the same practice applies to other word games where letters are allocated to positions of fixed width in a regular array).

The pointed digraph *pasekh tsvey yudn* can also be typed in different ways. The one is simply to enter a precomposed *pasekh tsvey yudn,* which is both displayed and stored as a single character ײַ (U+FB1F). The second option is to enter the *tsvey yudn* ligature as a base character and then to enter a combining *pasekh* for display together with it. Although appearing to be a single character ײַ, it is stored digitally as two separate characters (U+05F2 U+05B7). These two forms can only be directly entered from a keyboard on which the ligature appears. As a result, a practice is developing where *pasekh tsvey yudn* are indicated by enclosing a *pasekh* between the elements of a two-character digraph. The *pasekh* aligns correctly only with the first *yud* (subject to conditions described in the next section) but the display is tolerably that of a fully marked digraph ײַ and in some display environments may be indistinguishable from one or both of the previous alternatives. However, this option requires the storage of three separate characters (U+05D9 U+05B7 U+05D9). As a fourth alternative, albeit the least stable typographically, the second of two consecutive *yudn* may be pointed ײַ (U+05D9 U+05D9 U+05B7). A *pasekh yud* is otherwise not part of any established Yiddish character repertoire, and its use in this context manifests conditions that are specific to computerized typography. The four possible representations of the *pasekh tsvey yudn* thus have even greater potential for causing confusion than do the other digraphs. A further potentially confusing option specific to computerized text production, but not a component of any Yiddish orthographic tradition, is the combination of a *khirik* with a *tsvey yudn* ligature to represent the consonant-vowel sequence *yud — khirik yud,* as ײִ (U+05F2 U+05B4) rather than the correct ײִ (U+05D9 U+05D9 U+05B4).

Combining marks

Fonts that support Hebrew script do not always correctly render the combining points that are specific to Yiddish (and in many cases have general difficulty with Hebrew marks). Some applications display extraneous blank space adjacent to a letter with such a mark, and the mark may be displayed in that space rather than properly positioned with the base character. Writing text for presentation in a reading environment that has unknown font resources — as will almost invariably be the case with <u>HTML</u> documents — thus needs special care. Here again, this is not simply a matter of typographic preference. The disjunction of combining and base characters can easily lead to error when character sequences are copied from one application into another

The same alternative modes of entry that are illustrated above with the *pasekh tsvey yudn* are available for all of the other pointed characters used in Yiddish, with largely indistinguishable visual results but with differing internal representations. Any such character that appears on either a physical or a <u>virtual keyboard</u> will normally be recorded as a two-character sequence consisting of the base character followed by the combining mark. If a graphic character selector is used that does not emulate a keyboard, the desired character will be chosen from a table on the basis of its appearance. Since such facilities display combining marks separately from base characters, it is likely that the precomposed character form of a character will be the more readily recognized of the alternatives.

Most applications will accept either form of input, but frequently <u>normalize</u> it to the combining characters. There are, however, some applications that normalize all input to precomposed characters. Digital texts containing the combining, and the precomposed alternatives are therefore both encountered. An example of extensive text using precomposed characters is provided by the online edition of the periodical לעבנס־פֿראַגן (*lebns-fragn* - "Life Questions").

The present article was written using combining characters with the exception of the second row in the following table, which is provided to illustrate the differences between the two forms. In a viewing environment prone to the misalignment of base characters with their combining marks, precomposed characters are more likely to be typographically stable (but may cause greater difficulty in other regards).

Combining	אַ	אָ	בּ	בֿ	וּ	וֹ	יִ	יי	כ	כּ	פּ	פֿ	שׁ	ת
<u>**Precomposed**</u>	אַ	אָ	בּ	בֿ	וּ	וֹ	יִ	יי	כ	כּ	פּ	פֿ	שׁ	ת

Punctuation

The punctuation marks used to indicate sentence structure — the comma, period, colon, and semicolon — are the same in Yiddish as they are in English. The punctuation used for the abbreviation, contraction, and concatenation of words — the apostrophe and hyphen — are conceptually similar but typographically distinct in a manner that, yet again, can cause confusion when represented digitally. This can be illustrated with the contraction for עס איז (*es iz* = "it is"), which is ס׳איז (*s'iz* = "it's"). Although the Yiddish punctuation mark is termed an אַפּאָסטראָף (*apostrof*) the character used to represent it is the Hebrew *geresh*, which differs both in its graphic appearance and, more importantly, in its digital representation. (The APOSTROPHE is U+0027, and the HEBREW PUNCTUATION GERESH is U+05F3.) What is termed a double apostrophe is used to indicate abbreviation through the removal of several consecutive letters. For example, דאָקטאָר (*doktor* = "doctor") is abbreviated ד״ר (equivalent to "Dr."). The punctuation mark is, however, not the QUOTATION MARK (U+0022), but the HEBREW PUNCTUATION <u>GERSHAYIM</u> (U+05F4), which is the <u>dual</u> form of the word *geresh*.

Yiddish words are also hyphenated in a manner that is directly comparable to English punctuation. The character used to indicate it is, however, not the HYPHEN-MINUS (U+002D), but the HEBREW PUNCTUATION MAQAF (U+05BE). The latter character appears as the horizontal mark flush with the top of the text in מאַמע־לשון (*mame-loshn* - "mother tongue"; the common vernacular designation for the Yiddish language). Typeset text may also indicate hyphenation with a character resembling an equal sign, sometimes in an oblique variant, but this is uncommon in digital text.

The distinctions between *geresh - gershayim - maqaf* and "apostrophe - quotation mark - hyphen" are always indicated correctly in typeset material (with exception for the occasional deliberate use of the hyphen instead of the maqaf). All characters in the first group are, however, not directly available on many Hebrew or Yiddish keyboards, and any that is lacking is commonly replaced by the corresponding character in the second group. Here again, in situations that depend on the correct matching of character sequences, th fall-back representation of a punctuation mark may not match the stored target of a database query, without the reason for the failure being apparent to a non-specialist user.

Paired characters such as parentheses, brackets, and quotation marks, which are typographically mirrored — ( ) [ ] { } " " — are prone to incorrect presentation in digital Yiddish text, with the opening and closing forms appearing to have exchanged places. (There are several instances in the preceding text where this problem will be apparent on systems that do not properly render mirroring characters in bidirectional text.)

See also

- Yiddish dialects
- Yiddish phonology
- Hebrew punctuation

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External links

- Ezra SIL - a freely available font designed for heavily marked Hebrew script
- Yiddish Typewriter - online interconversion of Hebrew script and YIVO transliteration