

**The following quote is taken verbatim from the Preface to
the 1981 publication of Uriel Weinreich's
COLLEGE YIDDISH**

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION [1949]

A language which is written and used for various cultural purposes needs a codified standard. Intercommunication on a higher level is essentially impeded where such a unified standard is not sufficiently maintained, or is even not elaborated. Without a well-organized, rich lexical stock, supple and at the same time stabilized enough to express the most refined nuances of abstract thought and of our widely differentiated spiritual and material life, neither poetry nor the novel can hope to rise and overcome the restraining bonds of provincial backwardness, and scholarship remains helplessly mute. Without a clearcut norm of standard pronunciation, rhymes are dulled, the theatrical ensemble deteriorates, and the most lofty radio speeches have a burlesque flavor. Perhaps the most pertinent component in the responsible work of normalizing a language is the precise regulation of grammatical pattern. As there is no genuine sport without rules of play, and as a building demands an intricate plan, so too a cultural tongue necessarily implies a firm grammatical frame.

Yiddish has a rich and dramatic cultural history. It has undergone all processes which fertilize and ferment linguistic evolution—capricious migration of speech and speakers, ramified hybridization, intimate coexistence and stubborn competition with other languages, tempering struggle for mastery of diverse fields of culture, and last but not least, significant achievement in belleslettres as well as fruitful philological discussions about various problems of the young literary language. There is no lack of standard. Standard is being created, step by step. The burning task, however, is its spread and popularization. Under conditions of diaspora, a rigorously unified standard is even a much more vital premise for the being and development of a cultural

language than it is in a closely knit speech community. There cannot be approximate knowledge of a literary language for its users. Full mastery or illiteracy—*tertium non datur*. The first tool for such a mastery is a textbook of grammar. The idea is extremely banal, but banalities are most easily and frequently forgotten. And strange as it seems, a rational, practical textbook of Yiddish happens to be a pioneering work. This is one of the many paradoxical features in the singular historical march of this language.

A further banality, particularly often and almost universally disregarded, is that a textbook dealing with a language and its structure must be made by a person trained in the science of language. No one unfamiliar with mechanics will undertake writing an engineering textbook, but still there are too many school grammars prepared by people who never bothered with the science of language. It is encouraging that the first English textbook of Yiddish has been written by a qualified student of linguistics.

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