Jewish Hungarian

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Introduction

Hungary has the 13th largest Jewish community of any country, estimated at 47,400 (della Pergola 2018), or between 58,000 and 110,000 (by matrilineal definition, Kovács and Barna 2018). Today, most Jews in Hungary speak Hungarian as their primary language. In addition, many Hungarian Jews have migrated to Israel, Northern America, and Australia, and some have maintained Hungarian across generations.

Hungarian (Magyar) is a Ugric language within the Finno-Ugric (Uralic) family, with an estimated number of native speakers ranging between 12 and 14 million. It is spoken mainly in Hungary and certain areas of the Carpathian Basin (formerly belonging to the Kingdom of Hungary), as well as in the Hungarian diaspora. Since the age of emancipation, Jews have spoken Hungarian with words from Hebrew and Yiddish, especially referring to Jewish-specific concepts like holidays and religious observance.

Quick Facts:

Name of language:
Jewish Hungarian

Territories where spoken:
Hungary and neighboring areas in Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine and Serbia; Hungarian Jewish diaspora (Israel, United States, Canada, Australia…).

Estimated number of speakers:
unknown.

Writing system:
Latin alphabet

Language family:
variety of Hungarian; Finno-Ugric (Uralic)

Historical overview

Jewish presence in the Carpathian basin is well documented in Roman times, but from the subsequent periods, evidence is scarce or disputed. Romanticist historians speculated that Khazars of Jewish faith may have joined the conquering Magyar tribes (895 CE). What can be asserted is the presence of well-established Jewish communities in some towns of the Kingdom of Hungary by the twelfth or thirteenth century.

Not much is known about their languages. Tombstones and synagogue inscriptions are in Hebrew, while the royal and municipal charters mentioning them are in Latin. Medieval Hebrew documents survived recycled within non-Jewish codex bindings. Most Jews in Medieval Hungary must have come from German-speaking lands, maintaining family and trade connections, and occasionally forced to migrate due to anti-Jewish laws. The population of the towns in which they resided included a large proportion of Germans, beside Hungarians, Italians, and other ethnic groups. It is therefore safe to assume that the Jews maintained their Judeo-German (early Yiddish) language varieties, and only acquired a basic knowledge of Hungarian to communicate with their neighbors (who, besides, were also first- or second-language speakers of German). This assumption is corroborated by the frequent use of German and Germanizing names. In the late Middle Ages, some charters issued in Latin by municipalities on matters pertaining to Jews included a summary in German with Hebrew script; however, evidence also shows that some Jewish merchants in the sixteenth century used impeccable Latin in their business communication (Szende 2009: 227-228). To conclude, no evidence points to the presence of any form of medieval Judeo-Hungarian.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represent a turning point in the history of Hungary and the Hungarian language. Following the Ottoman conquest (starting in 1526), the Jewish population was partially replaced in the central regions of the country. Sephardic and Syrian Jews, arriving from the Balkans and the Middle East, enriched the linguistic landscape in the most notable Jewish community, Buda. These Jews, however, retreated together with the defeated Ottoman army in the 1680s. Additionally, an influx of refugees from Poland and Austria increased the number of Ashkenazim during the seventeenth century.

The turn of the century observed only small German-speaking Ashkenazic communities, mainly in peripheral towns not conquered by the Ottomans, the most famous of which are the *sheva kehilot* (*Siebengemeinden*, ‘seven communities’), now in Burgenland, Austria. The subsequent 200 years witnessed large migration waves from Austria, from the Czech and Moravian lands, and from Galicia to Hungary. These Jews initially spoke Western and Eastern dialects of Yiddish, as well as Jüdischdeutsch and German but gradually switched to Hungarian in the nineteenth century.

The language switch was a long social process, with heavy ideological burdens associated with it. *Magyarization* featured high in the political agenda of the progressive Jews since the 1840s, who were sympathetic to the Hungarian national movement (Hungary being part of the Habsburg Empire). Leopold Löw, although of Moravian origin, was the first rabbi to deliver sermons in Hungarian in 1844, and in 1848 he served as a chaplain in the Hungarian anti-Habsburg revolutionary army. At the same time, strict orthodoxy, in their adherence to Yiddish, followed the heritage of the *Ḥatam Sofer* (Moses Schreiber), who had emphasized the religious importance of using distinct Jewish languages. And yet, by the end of the nineteenth century, even the orthodox communities had switched to Hungarian. The Magyarization process was so successful that Jewish communities that found

themselves under Romanian, Czechoslovak, or Yugoslav rule after WW I maintained their Hungarian for much of the twentieth century. Hungarian Jews in Israel and the United States, even the orthodox, are reported to keep a surprisingly strong emotional tie to the language.

In what follows, I discuss four phenomena that could be categorized as “Jewish Hungarian”. The first two are “transitional languages”: the code of the Jews switching from Yiddish and German to Hungarian, and the code of those switching from Hungarian to Israeli Hebrew. I will argue that neither of them is an established language variety, with any level of stability or conventionality accepted by a community of speakers. One could also include in this category the language spoken by Israelis living permanently in Hungary. The third phenomenon is the Hungarian vocabulary component of Hebrew (or Aramaic) and Yiddish origin. Finally, I present a sketch of the Jewish Hungarian repertoire. In each case, I point to problems and possible research directions, in addition to presenting data.

Transitional code “Jewish Hungarian 1”: From Yiddish and German to Hungarian

A famous legend relates that Yitzchak Taub (1751–1821), the rebbe of Kalev (Nagykálló, a small town in Eastern Hungary) was once walking on the field when he heard a shepherd sing a song, which he recognized as originating in the Jerusalem Temple. He bought the song: he paid the shepherd and so the shepherd miraculously forgot it. The song itself, *Szól a kakas már* (‘The rooster is calling’), is a beautiful Hungarian folksong well known to folklorists, composed of three stanzas. The love song describes a lover yearning for the beloved, a magnificent ‘bird’ just before dawn. Yet, it gained a messianic interpretation in the Hasidic context, an allegory of the Jewish people yearning for the Messiah, just before the dawn of the Messianic Age. Two new stanzas follow the last line of the original folksong, which reads ‘If God destines me for you, then I will be yours!’:

De mikor lesz az már,
De mikor lesz az már?
Yibone ha-mikdosh, ir Tsiyoyn temale,
Akkor lesz az már.

De miért nincs az már,
De miért nincs az már?
Mipney chato’eynu golinu me’artseynu,
Azért nincs az már.
But when will it be [viz. that I will be yours],
But when will it be?
[Hebrew:] When the Temple is rebuilt, the city of Zion will be filled.
Then it will be.

But why isn't it already [viz. that I will be yours],
But why isn't it already?
[Hebrew:] Due to our sins we are exiled from our Land.
That is why it is not already.

I consider this composition the first known Jewish Hungarian literary piece. Shocking is the contrast between the stunning poetic forms in the first three stanzas, and the extremely simple Hungarian wordings of the last two. Mixed with well-known Hebrew liturgical panels (the song *Tzur mi-shelo* and the holiday *Musaf* prayer), the Jewish supplement to the Hungarian folksong symbolizes the late eighteenth-century linguistic landscape in Eastern Hungary. While the Jews must have had sufficient passive knowledge of the Hungarian language to understand, appreciate, and borrow the folk song, their active knowledge was still probably very much restricted to producing simple utterances.

The first half and the middle of the nineteenth century brought increased literary activity in Hungarian by Jewish authors, including poems by *maskilim*, sermons by progressive rabbis, and political and scholarly literature by the Jewish intelligentsia. A few decades later even orthodox associations were formed to promote the Hungarian language, despite fierce opposition by the students of the *Ḥatam Sofer*.

Much has been written about the social history of the *Magyarization* affecting different segments of Jewish society in Hungary at different paces. The literary output of various early Jewish writers has also been analyzed, many of them late second-language learners of Hungarian. Their oeuvres are composed of carefully edited works published in standard Hungarian, so it is difficult to assess the authors’ language proficiency and discuss language transfer patterns, for instance, in spontaneous speech. It is clear, however, that progressive Jews in the (later) nineteenth century full-heartedly wished to integrate into educated Hungarian society, and they managed to do so linguistically to the satisfaction of their contemporaries. Did they really achieve near-native competence, or were their peers just being nice enough not to criticize them? Each case must have been different.

It follows that Jews adopting Hungarian did not develop a distinct, conventionalized, and quasi-stable sociolect. “Jewish Hungarian 1” was a transitional code. Jews in Hungary who were native speakers of Yiddish or German had to learn Hungarian as a second language. They did so sometimes because of external necessity (for trade, or because of legislation regarding public education), and sometimes they really wished to integrate into the *Magyar* society. Some managed to acquire native-like competence; others did not, but their children did. How this linguistic transition happened – across social layers, at various linguistic levels, and along one’s lifespan – still ought to be explored (also considering probably huge individual differences).

(One theatrical representation of what might be considered Jewish speech – to be confirmed or rejected by future considerations – is the famous interwar cabaret duo *Hacsek és Sajó* by Jewish author László Vadnai. The dialogue of the two petit-bourgeois characters might have been intended and/or perceived as a caricature of stereotypically Jewish linguistic features, especially sing-song intonation.)

Transitional code “Jewish Hungarian 2”: From Hungarian to Israeli Hebrew

By the early twentieth century, practically all Jewish communities in Hungarian-speaking areas had become *Magyarized*. Then, history forced many of them to learn a new language: Romanian, Czech, Slovak, or Serbian, if they lived in places affected by the Treaty of Versailles (Trianon); or English, if they emigrated to Northern America or Australia; or Israeli Hebrew, if they made aliyah.

Hungarian speaking Jews have famously adhered to Hungarian. The Israeli newspaper *Új Kelet* [*New East/ Sunrise*], originally established in 1918 in Transylvania under Romanian occupation, was published as a daily until 2000 (!), and still appears monthly with a new generation of editors who made aliyah in the last few decades. Searchable in a digitized form on the Historical Jewish Press website, it is a valuable resource for Hungarian language usage in Israel. The language in *Új Kelet* basically fits the contemporaneous literary standards of Hungarian. Yet, as trivially happens to all Diaspora languages, the Hungarian spoken by olim, as attested in their newspaper, quickly integrated many words related to their new environment, such as *Keren Hajjeszod* and *Bituach Leumi*.

Diaspora languages diverge from the standard language not only by exhibiting new developments, but also by preserving older features. As an example of an earlier form being crystalized in Diaspora usage, consider the short designation of the *United Nations*. In its first years, in the press in Hungary, it was referred to either as UNO or ENSZ, the acronym of its official Hungarian name. While the latter has become the dominant form by far in Hungary since the 1950s, the former persisted in (Jewish and non-Jewish) émigré publications, including *Új Kelet*.
The ambient language also influences the vocabulary of a Diaspora idiom. According to anecdotal evidence, Jewish Hungarian in Israel used the word *nap-napi* for the adjective ‘everyday,’ a calque of the Israeli Hebrew *yom-yomi* (with a reduplication of Hungarian *nap*, Hebrew *yom* ‘day’; followed by the derivative suffix -i forming adjectives, coincidentally, in both languages). This Israeli Hungarian form was further motivated by existing expressions in Hungarian, such as *nap nap után* ‘day after day.’

Code-mixing and code-switching are recurrent phenomena in contact situations, even beyond the adoption of new words, and it must have happened abundantly among Hungarian-speaking Jews in Israel. Rosenhouse (2015, 2018) discusses examples thereof in pieces of literature (E. Abádi, I. Kaczér and F. Kishont [E. Kishon]). Yet, an analysis must first disentangle the use of code-mixing as a literary device from occasional and semi-conventionalized forms of code-mixing in everyday usage. In any case, sthe matrix language in these code-switching examples is standard literary Hungarian, even if it sporadically includes – for various reasons – words of Jewish origin (older varieties of Hebrew, Yiddish or the Israeli language).

The Hebrew characteristic of native Hungarian speakers is well-known in Israel, including a noticeable intonation and prosodic features, as well as the use of Hungarian vowels [ɛ] and [ɔ] in Hebrew. According to a joke, Ephraim Kishon and Tommy Lapid, both with Hungarian family backgrounds, went on a picnic. “You bring the *okhel* [food], and I bring the *ohel* [tent]” – told one to the other. They starved, because Hungarian only has the [h] sound and neither brought okhel [food]. In reality, however, the reversed hypercorrection, occasionally substituting [χ] for [h] is a phenomenon considerably more frequent among Hungarian learners of Hebrew.

Much less is known of the linguistic features of the Hungarian actually spoken by this generation of *olim*. Judith Rosenhouse has collected significant data on phonetic aspects of their speech, as well as some observations on language use, code switching, and cross-linguistic interference. One of her subjects said, laughing, that “both in Hungarian and in Hebrew I speak Hungarian” (Rosenhouse 2012, p. 221). In other words, their ‘Hungarian Hebrew’ can be easily perceived and is openly acknowledged; whereas their ‘Jewish Hungarian’ can hardly be distinguished from and is considered by them identical to standard Hungarian, apart from code-switching.
Often the children, and sometimes even the grandchildren, of Hungarian *olim* speak the language, although their native Hebrew strongly influences their Hungarian, for instance in their use of [ʁ] in lieu of Hungarian [r]. Rosenhouse (2012, n. 13) mentions a second-generation speaker who systematically substitutes [χ] for [h] in Hungarian – potentially an emerging phonetic phenomenon in Jewish Hungarian 2. To test it, bilingualism studies ought to be carried out on a cohort of children born and currently being raised in Israel by parents who met in Hungary and still speak Hungarian. Do they also exhibit this phenomenon?

Importantly, many of these young adult parents actively use Hungarian, working for printed and online newspapers, or playing an influencer role in social media. They also regularly visit Hungary. Their situation is very different from those arriving in Israel in the 1940s or after the 1956 revolution, many of whom refused to speak Hungarian for ideological reasons, or spoke it only at home. While earlier generations of *olim* from Hungary used Hungarian in atomized communities, the new generation maintains its ties to standard Hungarian.
Therefore, I propose, “Jewish Hungarian 2” is not a conventionalized language variety. It is not used in a stable form by a certain community of speakers, and it is not transmitted as such to a new generation. Each speaker has a different story of language change. Each micro-community (a family, a group of friends, a website) is affected by divergent socio-linguistic factors. Standard Hungarian is the single point of reference, relative to which “Jewish Hungarian 2” is a transitional code, similarly to “Jewish Hungarian 1.” This time, however, the dynamics are the result of language attrition (as opposed to language acquisition in the earlier case), observable both on an individual and on a collective level.

Words of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Yiddish origin in Hungarian

Since King Stephen I adopted Christianity in the year 1000 or 1001, a huge amount of originally Hebrew words entered Hungarian via medieval European Christian culture. Examples include: *szombat* ('Saturday'; note the [m], possibly pointing to an early Eastern Slavic and Byzantine origin), *jubileum* ('jubilee,' from yovel; note the Latinate form) and countless Biblical given names. Another example is the word *behemót* ('big hulking creature,' originally designating a large animal, such as an elephant, from Hebrew *behēmōt*, probably 'hippopotamus,' plural of *behēmā* 'animal, cattle'). It might have been borrowed by sixteenth century theologians whose training included the study of Hebrew with a Sephardic-like pronunciation. The fact that *behemoth* also appears untranslated in the Vulgate (Job 40:10) might have been an additional factor. Parallel developments in other languages might have further catalyzed the process of borrowing this biblical word.

These words are considered by no means as belonging to some Jewish Hungarian vocabulary. The same applies to several words of Yiddish origin, or of Hebrew (and Aramaic) origin with an Ashkenazic pronunciation: *haver* ('friend'), *meló* ('work,' from *melokhe* < *melākhā*), and *majré* ('fear,' from *moyre* < *mōrā*). These have lost their Jewish valence and belong to the informal, slang, or substandard language, formerly a thieves' argot. The same jargon also includes many words of Roma (gypsy) origin. Several publications have appeared listing Hebrew / Yiddish / Jewish words in Hungarian, mainly of this kind, and sometimes even mistakenly including words from Roma languages or elsewhere. (See the selection of wordlists below. Note that the word *tréfa* 'joke', mentioned in some works on Jewish-Hungarian is of Italian origin, and is attested in medieval Latin and early modern Hungarian texts.)

A scholarly study must also flag those words that arrived in Hungarian not directly from Yiddish, but via *Rotwelsch*, a secret language or thieves' argot in German-speaking countries. *Haver*, *meló*, and *majré*, mentioned above, can all be found in a similar form in Rotwelsch. The slang meaning of *kóser* ('good, fine, legal') also stems from Rotwelsch, even if its usage was further motivated by all speakers' rough familiarity with its original meaning. In the case of *dafke* ('just for spite'), the devoiced [f] substantiates the West Yiddish origin of this adverb, and its nominalization in the expression *dafkéból* ('out of spite') reveals its provenance via Rotwelsch and (Austrian) German (cf. German *aus Daffke*).

If these words entered Hungarian via non-Jewish agents, then it is no surprise that they did not create a Jewish sociolect. It might have been only a secondary development that Hungarian speaking Jews recognized the Hebrew and Yiddish origin of those slang words and began listing them as if they were Jewish words in Hungarian. A recent example is the news site akibic.hu, whose statutes (2012) is explicit about the Yiddish origin of the word *kibic* ('kibitz'). Compare this choice to the title of another Jewish periodical, *Córesz* ('tsuris, problems, troubles', published by the Hungarian Union of Jewish Students in the later 1990s), similarly motivated by the Jewish valence of the word. However, in the former case, it was in fact a word of German origin (*Kiebitz* 'peewit, lapwing'), *kibitz* that acquired a new meaning in Rothwelsch and then spread to English, Yiddish and standard Hungarian (attested in non-Jewish late nineteenth century literature), as well. It follows that it obtained a Jewish flavor only secondarily, due to its parallel presence in Yiddish, and the "proud Judaization" of the Rotwelsch register in general.

While probably no such study has ever been done, I conjecture that native Hungarian speakers of Jewish origin would not use (and have never used) these words significantly more frequently than their non-Jewish peers. By contrast, there are words (mostly of Hebrew or Yiddish origin) that are indeed characteristic to Jews speaking Hungarian: either because of their meaning (related to Judaism or Jewish culture), or because they represent otherwise a peculiar Jewish repertoire.

Words of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Yiddish origin in Jewish Hungarian

As opposed to the words borrowed from Rotwelsch, some words indeed reached Hungarian directly from Yiddish. It is hard to establish if a word such as córesz ('tsuris, problems, troubles', originally from Hebrew tsarot 'distresses')was first used in Hungarian context by Magyarizing Jews, or by Christian Hungarians overhearing it from Jewish neighbors. In any case, its Jewish origin and flavor was – and still is – strongly present, when used by both Jews and non-Jews, either with a neutral or pejorative overtone.

Other words have been more restricted to the vocabulary of Jews, such as *hücpe* ('chutzpah'), *azeszpónem* ('audacious, arrogant, impudent'), and *betamt* ('intelligent, well-mannered, spirited, handsome', from a Hebrew-Yiddish for 'flavored', typically describing eligible young men). However, these words naturally appear in spoken language only. Their earliest attestations come from Jewish satirical magazines, such as *Borsszem Jankó* (published between 1868 and 1938). The weekly Egyenlőség (published between 1882 and 1938), the leading voice and display case of neolog Judaism, hardly contains these words. Here comes an extract from a fictitious interview with an imaginary Yiddish-speaking orthodox rabbi, "Ignacz Reich," from the humorous supplement of *Egyenlőség* (March 4, 1892, p. 17):

(…) De várjon csak, kedves reporterlében, nem tenne maga sidecht? Soll iech azoi leben, magának való lányt tudok, sok, sok pénzzel. Magából azután, ha megnöveszti a szakállát és kicsit a peieszt, olyan betámt zsidó lesz, hogy no! (…)

(…) But please, wait, dear reporter-leben [Yiddishism], you not make shiduch? *Zol ikh azoy leben* ['to my life'], I know a match for you, with much, much money! Then you, if you grow your beard, and a little bit your *peyes*, you become such a *betamt* Jew! (…)

Clearly, the acculturated readership was expected to understand this strange language. Their knowledge of German being insufficient to grasp the above passage, they must have also known what *sidech* ('arranged marriage'), *peiesz* ('sidelock') and betamt referred to. And yet, the newly Magyarized Jews did not openly embrace this register, they only used it to ridicule the non-assimilated orthodox.

The Jewish-specific vocabulary pertains primarily to Jewish religion, culture and gastronomy. Jews speaking Hungarian may translate them to standard Hungarian (cf. *gyertya* 'candle', *Tóra-tekercs* 'Torah scroll', the Hebrew words *ner* and *szefer* being only used in a scholarly context as deliberate code-mixing); and adopt a word from a Jewish language (*muszaf* / *müszef* 'additional prayer'). Not infrequently did the Jewish usage reflect protestant terminology (e.g., the word *hitközség* 'congregation' is primarily used in Baptist and Jewish contexts).

Often, two expressions co-exist (*imakönyv* 'prayer book' and *szidur* 'siddur'; *szombat* 'Saturday' and *sábát* / *sábesz* 'Shabbat'). At times, the Hungarian expression (e.g., *előimádkozó* 'prayer leader'; *kántor* 'cantor') is associated with the neolog movement (the Hungarian branch of positive-historical Judaism, comparable to conservative/masorti Judaism), which was in the forefront of Magyarization, whereas the Hebrew or Yiddish expression is identified with orthodoxy (e.g. *sliach cibur*; *hazan*). Yet, empirical studies still need to corroborate and refine the received wisdom, since a major part of orthodoxy was also affected by significant acculturation, whereas many neolog rabbis did not necessarily disavow their orthodox or traditional upbringing. The difference between a *templom* ('temple'), a *zsinagóga* ('synagogue') and a *sul* / *sül* / *sil* ('shul') is not simply socio-linguistic or ideological, but also architectural and functional. The difference between a weekday *ima* ('prayer') and a holiday *istentisztelet* ('service', borrowed from the protestant vocabulary) is primarily esthetic, even if a neolog would rather *imádkozik* ('to pray'), and not *davenol* ('to pray' < Yidd. *davenen*).

Interestingly, newer generations, since the second half of the twentieth century, prefer the emic terms, such as *rabbi* and *zsinagóga* ('synagogue') to etic terms, such as *pap* ('priest') and *templom* ('temple, church'), which were also widely used in the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Jewish contexts. A possible explanation thereof might be that earlier generations wished to emphasize Jews being part of the Hungarian culture and society by using shared terms, whereas the newer generations wished to highlight the characteristics of Judaism. Since non-Jews have also adopted these changing usages, the choice between the terms *rabbi* and *pap*, *templom* and *zsinagóga* does not and did not effectively reflect the speaker's identity. Let us also mention those few speakers (either of Jewish origin, or not) who still consider the term *zsidó* ('Jewish') a politically incorrect taboo word – which it really never was – or are simply afraid of speaking about anything Jewish in general, and so they would prefer euphemistic expressions such as *izraelita templom* ('an Israelite temple').

Many of these words have been fully integrated into the morphological system of Hungarian. They can undergo compounding (*maceszgombócleves*, from macesz + gombóc + leves, 'matzah ball soup'), inflection (*kidusoknak* 'kiddush + plural + dative'; *kóser pészahra* 'kosher for Passover', using the sublative case) and derivation (*kaserolás* or *kóserolás*, 'koshering', with the affixes -(o)l turning the adjective into a verb, and -ás turning it into an abstract noun). When verbs are borrowed, the suffix -(o)l enables the form to enter the system of verbal morphology: bencsol ('to bentsh, to recite the Grace After Meals' < Yidd. bentsh=n of Romance origin), *lejnol* or *lájnol* ('to read from the Torah' < Yidd. *leyen=en*, of Romance origin), or [tfillint] *légol* ('to put on [phylacteries + accusative] < Yidd. *leyg=n*, of Germanic origin).

A detailed study should also focus on the phonological and dialectal features of these words. Some forms have been clearly integrated into the sound system of the language. A fully assimilated word, which has practically lost its Jewishness, is *sólet* ('cholent'). A popular dish with non-Jews, its origin is only known to specialists in gastronomy together with the origin of its name. The word *széder* ('Seder, Seder night') is also familiar to many non-Jews, and it does not sound "foreign" to them (it is a minimal pair with *szeder* 'blackberry'). Interestingly, the word *széder* most frequently combines with the word *este* or *est*, meaning 'evening', and hardly ever with a word meaning 'night'. Yet, other items have been less integrated. They may be perceived as 'foreign,' their pronunciations display considerable variations, and they show more clearly their dialectal origin.

Hungary lies on the historical border of Eastern and Western Yiddish. The local dialects of Yiddish and Ashkenazic Hebrew interacted with the phonemic peculiarities of the newly acquired Hungarian. While the process of *Magyarization* was going on, inherited Eastern and Western linguistic features still reflected one's origin (Eastern Hungary, Poland and Galicia, vs. Western Hungary, Austria and Moravia), a form of identity that was stereotypically associated to socio-economic status, education and religiosity. Then, the modern academic pronunciation of Hebrew, as well as the Zionist-Israeli pronunciation also entered the picture. Consequently, not only did the divergent pronunciations have different prestige (Western over Eastern), but they also represented various ideologies (orthodox vs. neolog, traditional religious vs. academic, Hungarian patriotism vs. Zionist).
The result is a wide range of possible pronunciations of Hebrew-origin words, across different contexts, periods, and authors. For instance, an original [u] can remain, or can become a palatalized [y] (spelled as *ü*), as in Hungarian Yiddish, or a fronted [i], as in southern (Polish) Yiddish. Unlike the source languages, Hungarian lacks [a], but has a phonemic contrast between /ɒ/ and /aː/. Therefore, partially integrated loanwords would often include a sound on the [ɒ]-[a]-[aː] spectrum, with considerable variations. Here come some examples, the names of Jewish holidays:

> *Ros hasana / raus hasono / rajs hasone / rasesone / rasesúne*
> *Jom kippur / jaum hakippurim / jankiper.*
> *Szukot / szukausz / szükesz / szikesz.*
> *Savuot / sovuausz / svüesz / sviesz.*

As a side remark, here and below Hungarian spelling is used: for instance, the letter s stands for the [ʃ], i.e. [š] sound, and sz for the [s] sound. Transliteration approximately follows the system suggested by the *Osiris Helyesírás* volume (Laczkó and Mártonfi, 2004). Note, however, that Jewish Hungarian has always displayed huge variations in spelling. These are partially due to the German influence earlier, and the English influence more recently (e.g., *Rosch Haschana* and *Rosh Hashana*, respectively). A further challenge is posed by the [χ] sound missing from Hungarian phonology. The earlier cultural influence of German motivated the *ch* grapheme until recently, but it would recall the [tʃ], i.e. [č] sound for the anglophone young people. Consider the spellings *hanuka* vs. *Chanukka*, and all combinations in-between, also *khanuke* for the Yiddishists, and recently *ḥanuka* in the calendar of Chabad/ḤaBaD. Discussing further loci of spelling variation (diacritics, capitalization, hyphenation, etc.) would require far more space.

In an interview I conducted in 2012 with the late Joseph Schweitzer, former chief rabbi of Hungary and director of the Rabbinical Seminary, I could observe the ways he mixed (and occasionally even blended) different pronunciations, often even within a single sentence: a traditional pronunciation he learned from his grandfather, a more "Eastern" (Galician) pronunciation employed by his Talmud teacher, the Western Ashkenazic pronunciation employed earlier in "official" contexts, the academic pronunciation adopted from Christian Hebraists, and an Israeli-like pronunciation, which he might have learned from Zionists in his youth. Yet, a systematic corpus study of the distribution of these and similar forms is still lacking, but it should confirm the "received wisdom" and anecdotical evidences.

As we approach the present, some forms vanish. The *holem* rendered as [au], a Western pronunciation considered earlier as elegant and official, probably disappeared with Prof. Schweitzer's generation. Except for some *baalei teshuvah* in orthodox circles, Israeli influence – including Israeli pronunciation – has grown more influential after 1989. Thus, the word *kipa* gradually replaced *kapedli* ('skullcap'), the Hanukkah candlestick became known as *hanukija* (and not as *menóra* anymore), *sabat salom* gained priority over (but did not fully replace) gut *sabesz*, and the greeting *moadim le-szimha* also spread in Hungarian Jewish communities. The newer generation is often unaware of how recent these linguistic developments are.

The language spoken by Jews in (contemporary) Hungary

Aside from these Hebrew words in the realm of Judaism, we can also identify other features of a "Jewish repertoire" – words and expressions or other linguistic features at any level of language (phonology, morphology, syntax…) that are distinctive among Jewish speakers, that occur significantly more often in the language produced by Jews, or that are perceived – either by Jews, or by non-Jews – as characteristically Jewish. Answering these questions is notoriously hard, because spoken corpora of Jewish Hungarian hardly exist, while the written language produced by Hungarian Jews, as argued above, has followed the norms of the standard literary language.

Literary and scholarly pieces will obviously include Jewish linguistic features when covering themes related to Judaism, Jewish history and culture, or Israel. Jewish authors might have touched these themes more frequently and in a more informed way in the past. Therefore, statistically speaking, authors of Jewish origin should display more of these linguistic features. As an extreme case, consider rabbinic sermons, many of which have been published, full of quotations in Hebrew; or the title of a novel by Nobel Prize winner Imre Kertész: *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* (1990). Yet, I hypothesize, Jewish linguistic features in these pieces can be fully accounted for by literary factors, related to the topic and the genre, without a need for further socio-linguistic considerations. It is not inconceivable, however, that a thorough study of the work of a new generation of self-consciously Jewish authors might refute this hypothesis in the future, bringing to light the linguistic consequences of a "dissimilationist" identity. In what follows, I focus on linguistic features that are well-integrated into Hungarian, but which are somehow considered "Jewish" by at least certain speakers (Jews and/or non-Jews), and stand in contrast to some equivalent (synonymous) alternatives.

As an example, consider the word *macesz* ('matzo'), mentioned in the previous section, and its synonym, *pászka* ('azyme, unleavened bread', used in Hungarian cuisine). Both are known to any (reasonably educated) native speaker of Hungarian. And yet, the former clearly belongs to the "Jewish repertoire," and it is recognized as such by both Jewish and non-Jewish speakers. Observe both names printed in different sizes – in front of a rural background with a Christian church – on the box of azyme produced for a non-kosher, non-Jewish market.

Pászka, a.k.a. *macesz* ('azyme, matzo'), as a non-kosher, non-Jewish product, on a supermarket shelf in Budapest. (Picture taken by the author, on 04/30/2020)

Similarly, *pészah* ('Passover') would be the name of the Jewish holiday in a contemporary context, as used by Jews and (educated) non-Jews alike. Still, Christians might speak of *pászka* or *pászka ünnepe* ('Pascha, the holiday of the unleavened bread') in a Biblical setting, while choosing the word *pészah* as the time of the crucifixion of Jesus would deliberately re-Judaize the New Testament (a step consciously taken by some Jewish and non-Jewish speakers). Again, we have here a term associated with Judaism that is opposed to a closely related, but non-Jewish (or, in this case, de-Judaized) term.

Besides, a third alternative, *zsidó húsvét* ('Jewish Easter') also appears in all contexts. As an example of the trend mentioned in the previous section, however, the usage among Jews of this etic expression had vanished in favor of *pészah* by the end of the twentieth century. The paradoxical expression aims at mirroring the historical complexity of the two intertwined religious cultures, but the paradox only works if the word *húsvét* should otherwise be exclusively associated with Christianity.

Jewish *húsvét* ('Easter') or Christian *pészah* ('Passover')? Facebook picture of a discussion organized

In the previous examples, the Jewish and non-Jewish "nature" of the alternatives were equally known to all speakers of Hungarian. The choice was influenced by the interaction of the identity of the speaker and the precise meaning intended to be expressed. Our next example is a standard Hungarian phrase that is recently absorbing some Jewish flavor, at least for some Jewish speakers.

This recent development concerns the use of *Legyen neki könnyű a föld* ('May the ground be light to him/her'), from the Latin funerary inscription *Sit tibi terra levis*, as an alternative to standard *nyugodjék békében* ('rest in peace'). While well-attested in Hungarian folklore and literature, this expression has surprisingly quickly spread in recent years among secular Jews. Unaware of the traditional phrase *barukh dajan ha-emet*, some of them seem to believe that *Legyen neki könnyű a föld* is a Jewish expression.

Twentieth-century Zionist movements and contemporary Jewish youth organizations have developed their own terminology in opposition to standard Hungarian. A *madrich* would be called an *ifjúsági vezető* ('youth leader') in a non-Jewish milieu. What they organize is a *peula* in a Jewish youth organization, otherwise a program or *tevékenység* ('activity'). These words, however, belong to the special register of Jewish youth organizations, and are not known beyond them – apart from the children's parents who also had attended those organizations a generation earlier.

A shibboleth for religiolects in Hungarian is the name of the prophet Isaiah: he is *Izaiás* for the Catholics, *Ézsajás* for the Protestants, and *Jesája* for the Jews. The term *Héber Biblia* ('Hebrew Bible') is gaining acceptance in non-scholarly circles only slowly these years, while *Tanakh* and *ad hoc* circumscriptions, such as *zsidó Biblia* ('Jewish Bible'), help avoid the term *Ószövetség* ('Old Testament').

Not choosing the "Christian repertoire" can also be observed elsewhere. Avoiding *áldott ünnepeket* ('Blessed Holidays,' also with Christmas, New Year and Easter) and preferring *boldog* ('happy') or *kellemes* ('nice') *ünnepeket* ('holidays'), would characterize the Jewish Hungarian usage. But this choice also characterizes the speech of many non-religious people in general in the holiday seasons.

Many self-respecting Jews would avoid oaths involving the names of Jesus and Mary. Others avoid referring to Palestine instead of Israel, even in historical contexts. But again, these examples are still directly related to Jewish religion, culture, and politics. There are no less self-evident ways of expressing linguistically one's Jewish identity in Hungarian to my best knowledge.

Does the Hungarian Jewish repertoire include phonological, morphological or syntactic features? Or did it so in the past? It is hard to point to anything that would be evident and well-known. Maybe future research shall reveal less noticeable phenomena.

Conclusion

To sum up, I have considered four possibilities to identify a Jewish Hungarian language. Only weak arguments could be made for the existence of a quasi-stable language or language variety shared by a community that displays distinctive features beyond lexicon. Yet, Hungarian Jews clearly have a rich linguistic heritage, evidencing

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