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**THE JEWISH LITHUANIAN PERIODICAL *APŽVALGA* (1935–1940):
TOWARDS A NEW CULTURAL POLYSYSTEM.**

by

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Abstract

The article investigates the purpose and mission of the Lithuanian-language Jewish periodical *Apžvalga* (*Review*, 1935–1940). Prior to Lithuanian independence, Lithuanian was a relatively un-attractive language for Jews; command of Lithuanian varied according to the needs, exposure and social networks of a particular individual. This changed after the establishment of the independent state (1918–1940). The new generation of Jews not only acquired Lithuanian in a short time, but produced experts in Lithuanian language and culture. The emergence of a Jewish Lithuanian-language periodical is unparalleled in the Baltic-Jewish cultural context. Topics connected with language as such, and with the languages of Jews, were constantly the focus of the newspaper. *Apžvalga* did not take sides in the Hebraist-Yiddishist controversy and promoted cultural rapprochement between Lithuanians and Jews. At the same time, *Apžvalga* was active at dispelling the myth of Jews as Russian-speakers. Coupled with the foundation of a Jewish school with Lithuanian as a language of instruction, the emergence of fiction and poetry in Lithuanian written by authors of Jewish descent, as well as other non-periodical Jewish publications in Lithuanian, the establishment of *Apžvalga* suggests that Lithuanian Jewry became less homogenous, and alongside Jewish identities based on tradition or modern nationalism (Zionism, Yiddishism) a new kind of Jewish socio-cultural profile emerged. Following Chone Shmeruk's ideas, the concept of a cultural polysystem (first proposed by Itamar Even-Zohar) is applied to the Lithuanian-Jewish case. It is argued that instead of static and rigid categories of ethnolinguistic identities, it would be more productive to view cultures and linguistic expression as dynamic systems.

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**THE JEWISH LITHUANIAN PERIODICAL *APŽVALGA* (1935–1940):
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Introduction

One of the customary images that arises from the literature on Jewish history is a picture of isolated Jewish versus non-Jewish communities. Šarunas Liekis discusses at length the tradition of the historiography and explains that such an approach often presents a view of ethnic groups that are ‘irreconcilably aligned’ or even antagonistic.¹ The interaction between Jews and co-territorial peoples is often understood in rather instrumental terms (i.e. communication out of necessity, in the economic sphere, and so on) without a deeper look into cultural contacts that may appear marginal in comparison to the mainstream (i.e. Jewish national ideologies of Yiddishism and Zionism, and concerns of nation state building among Lithuanians). The idea of Jews and Lithuanians as ‘cultural strangers’ is still popular in research on inter-war Lithuanian Jewry.² The current article argues that this may have been so to some extent, but was not the case for all Jews in Lithuania because the relatively short period of Lithuanian independence (1918–1940) gave rise to a different type of Jewry, maybe not as prominent numerically as adherents to Hebraist/Yiddishist/traditional values but yet symptomatic in their new socio-cultural profile.

Among other reasons for a static view is the recurrent use of conventional yet unclear terms such as ‘assimilation’ and ‘acculturation’, ‘in-group’, ‘out-group’, etc. Languages are considered clear-cut entities without intermediate categories (such as in-between varieties, multilingual speech, a continuum between standard languages and regional varieties etc). Also language ideologies (in this case, Hebraist or Yiddishist) encourage perceptions of languages and the ethnic groups they represent as discrete phenomena with precise borders. The notion of

¹ Šarunas Liekis, *A State within a State? Jewish Autonomy in Lithuania 1918–1925*. Vilnius: Versus Aureus, 2005. pp 18, 25–30.

² Šarunas Liekis, *A State within a State?* pp. 25–30.

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‘assimilation’ is devoid of meaning when it is not operationalised in a particular case study.³ It may mean different things to different communities, individuals, periods and so on. Long ago it became an element of the everyday speech of non-specialists and is used in a rather *ad hoc* manner. Very often Jewish assimilation is understood as language shift to a non-Jewish language; however, in the view of modern sociolinguistic research the notion of a non-Jewish language becomes controversial.⁴ In general, language shift does not presuppose culture shift or total abandonment of the former identity.

In the case of Jews, the relationship between ethnicity, language, tradition and identity becomes even more entangled because starting from the Enlightenment, Jews have gradually turned into an internally conflicting group (i.e., those who call themselves Jews represent rather different viewpoints on what it means). The opposition between secular Jewish nationalism and tradition, Yiddish and Hebrew as symbols of the modern Jewish nation are manifestations of this internal conflict.

In modern sociolinguistics, socio-psychological approaches (for instance, the theory of ethnolinguistic vitality), have been criticized by scholars working within post-structuralist frameworks.⁵ Mostly socio-psychological approaches do account for fuzzy borders, fluid identities and the emergence of new linguistic profiles. Indeed, multiple identities, simultaneous participation in different speech communities, and the complexity of choices faced by a multilingual individual cannot be adequately described via the notions of assimilation, integration, segregation and marginalization.

I am convinced that the changes in the socio-cultural profile of Lithuanian Jewry of independent Lithuania (and, probably, in other Baltic countries as well) require a more nuanced approach than just ‘assimilation’ or ‘acculturation’. Without doubt, the period in question witnessed a rapid acquisition of Lithuanian by Jews and one might even speak of the appropriation of Lithuanian by some Lithuanian Jews (see the discussion below). Language

³ See critique in Aneta Pavlenko, ‘Poststructuralist approaches to the study of social factors in second language learning and use’, in: Vivian Cook (ed.), *Portraits of the L2 User*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2002. pp. 277–302.

⁴ On Jewish American English and its significance for Jewish identities see: Sarah Bunin Benor, ‘Do American Jews speak “a Jewish Language”? A model of Jewish Linguistic Distinctiveness’. *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 99 (2), 2009, pp. 230–269.

⁵ See Aneta Pavlenko, ‘Poststructuralist Approaches’ and David Block, *Second Language Identities*. London: Continuum, 2007. pp. 72–23.

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acquisition, however, is not just an addition of another language system to a previous one; neither is language shift a simple substitution of one system with another. The underlying assumption of David Block's insightful monograph is that language acquisition, be it instructed or spontaneous, cannot be viewed in purely structural terms or as a simple formula $1 + 1 = 2$.⁶ According to him, issues of identity, either ethnic, racial, migrant or others are always involved. There is no reason to assume that in not very distant past this was not so.

I believe that a historical study of the culture of Lithuanian Jewry would gain from an interdisciplinary approach, especially if such a study focuses on language/ethnic communities. Inclusion of appropriate frameworks from the fields of cultural theory, (historical) sociolinguistics, language policy and language ideology, literary studies etc. would shed light on new facts and presumably help us to appreciate the complexity of the picture.

The structure of this paper is as follows: I will briefly describe the process of the diversification of Lithuanian Jewry before turning to the phenomenon of the Jewish periodical *Apžvalga (Review)*, describing its opinions about the languages of Jews and the state language, Lithuanian. Then I will draw parallels between the increasing internalization of Lithuanian by Jews and a similar process in Polish Jewry, described by Chone Shmeruk.⁷ He bases his account on the polysystem theory, formulated by Itamar Even-Zohar⁸, and favours an interdisciplinary approach. I find Shmeruk's idea of the application of polysystem theory fruitful and elaborate on how the model can be applied to Jewish Lithuanian case.

The Diversification of Lithuanian Jewry

Jews in Eastern Europe can be classified as a people with late modernization, exactly as their neighbours in the Russian Empire. Concepts of Jewish nationalism, be it Yiddishism or any version of Zionism, should be viewed, among other things, in the general context of the national awakening of East European peoples. The proponents of the modernization of East European

⁶ David Block, *Second Language Identities*.

⁷ Chone Shmeruk, 'Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture', in: Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz & Chone Shmeruk (eds.), *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*. Hannover & London: University Press of New England, 1989. pp. 285-311.

⁸ Itamar Even-Zohar, 'Polysystem Theory'. *Poetics Today* 1979, 1 (1-2), pp. 287-310; Itamar Even-Zohar, 'The Role of Russian and Yiddish in the crystallization of Modern Hebrew', in: Israel Bartal, Ezra Mendelsohn, Chava Turniansky (eds.), *Studies in Jewish Culture in Honour of Chone Shmeruk*. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1993. pp. 105-118; Itamar-Even Zohar, 'Polysystem theory (revised)', in: Even-Zohar, Itamar, *Papers in Culture Research*. Tel Aviv: Porter Chair of Semiotics, 2005, temporary electronic book, available at: <http://www.tau.ac.il/~itamarez/works/books/ez-cr2004-toc.htm> (accessed on 1 November 2009).

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Jewry wished to foster a link between ethnicity and language (exactly as did Latvians, Czechs and other oppressed peoples), considering Jews to be an ethnic group rather than in traditional ethno-confessional terms. The whole question was not the need of modernization *per se*, but which language, that is, Yiddish or Hebrew, is a symbol (or the symbol) of the Jewish people. Although a shift to Russian (or, in Latvia, to German) and the emergence of Jewish Russian culture did occur in the second part of the 19th century, it did not involve the masses of ordinary Jews who remained Yiddish-speaking.⁹ Thus, it is often assumed that borders between Jews and their neighbours (i.e. Ukrainians, Latvians, Lithuanians etc.) were rather rigid and clear and, everyday casual interaction notwithstanding, they remained aliens.¹⁰

It is true that for upwardly mobile Jews 'small languages' remained relatively unattractive, one reason being that the emerging intellectuals and proponents of these languages had to prove that these languages were suitable for the functions of modern culture and were more than merely 'peasant languages'. Probably knowledge of Lithuanian among Jews in pre-independence times varied depending on place of residence, occupation, local networks and so on. Whatever the proficiency in Lithuanian, few could write Standard Lithuanian.

After the establishment of independence, Jews constituted the biggest minority in Lithuania, approximately 8 % of the population, or some 150,000 people not counting Vilnius and its district. Ezra Mendelsohn shows that Lithuania, along with Poland and Latvia, was an ideal place for modern Jewish politics. Indeed, Jewish culture thrived and Jewish educational institutions, either Yiddish- or Hebrew-medium were established, and in a relatively short time developed impressive curricula.¹¹ Zionism enjoyed great popularity in Lithuania, but also the achievements of its Yiddishist opponents and moderate Yiddishists were impressive.¹² Leaving aside the question 'who won' or, as it is often posed in a more speculative manner, 'who would have won, had there been no occupations and the Holocaust', one can clearly observe a consolidation and fostering of Jewish secular nationalism, based on either Hebrew or Yiddish. However, the

⁹ Gennady Estraiikh, 'From Yiddish to Russian: a Story of Linguistic and Cultural Appropriation', in: Felicia Waldman (ed.), *Studia Hebraica* 8, 2008. (Bucharest: University of Bucharest, Faculty of Letters, the 'Goldstein Goren' Centre for Hebrew Studies). pp. 62–71.

¹⁰ Šarunas Liekis, *A State within a State*, p. 17.

¹¹ On Hebrew-medium schools see: Dov Lipets, 'Hebreische shul-vezn un kultur-bavegung in Lite (1919–1939)', in: H. Laykovitsh (ed.), *Lite*, vol. 2. Tel Aviv: Farlag I. Perets, 1965, pp. 293–323; on Yiddish-medium schools see: Eliyohu Shulman, 'Di yidish-veltlekhe shuln in Lite', in: H. Laykovitsh (ed.), *Lite*, vol. 2. Tel Aviv: Farlag I. Perets, 1965, pp. 323–350.

¹² On the development of the Zionist movement in Lithuania see a new study based on archival materials: Eglė Bendikaitė, *Sionistinis sąjūdis Lietuvoje*. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2006.

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articulation of Jewish aspirations as an ethnic group and respective language ideologies should not obscure the fact that other versions of Jewish identity, not based on religion, tradition or Jewish languages gradually emerged. These ‘other’ versions are often erroneously equated with assimilation because they do not involve any Jewish language or, for that matter, a non-Jewish language that has already been used by Jews for in-group purposes to some extent (Russian, German and, subsequently, English).

At the beginning of the 1920s, the educational system of Lithuania for the first time faced the task of teaching Modern Standard Lithuanian to minorities. The pedagogic history of Lithuanian as a foreign/second language has not been written; however, some facts are known and it can be stated that, Jews being the largest minority in Lithuania, it was Jewish experts in the Lithuanian language (for instance, Genrikas Zimanas [1910–1985] and Chackelis Lemchenas [1904–2001]) who developed teaching methods, argued about the essence of second language pedagogy as such and promoted a contrastive approach (i.e. based on the systematic comparison between the structures of the first and the second languages).¹³ As mentioned already, proficiency in Lithuanian among Jews varied; now the new sociolinguistic reality and the changed status of Lithuanian required not only a working knowledge of the language but also a command of writing and of official registers.

In less than fifteen years, the picture of proficiency in Lithuanian changed radically. Not only the new generation of Jews studied Lithuanian at Jewish school, but also the number of Jewish students in Lithuanian schools increased. At the beginning of the 1920s, almost a hundred percent of Jewish children attended Jewish (Yiddish, secular or traditional Hebrew) schools and a tiny segment of urban Jews with a Russian or German cultural orientation chose Russian or German schools. As of the 1935–1936 academic year, 20 % of Jewish children attended Lithuanian-medium schools.¹⁴ Unlike in Poland, the Jewish school system was supported by the state, therefore, there was no economic pressure in Lithuania to choose a non-Jewish school. The tendency is known to researchers and in this respect the situation of Jewry in Lithuania differs

¹³ See references and discussion in: Anna Verschik, ‘The First Textbook of Lithuanian for Yiddish-Speakers’, *Archivum Lithuanicum* 7, 2005, pp. 139–154. Genrikas Zimanas contributed articles to language planning journal *Gimtoji kalba* (‘Mother tongue’), for instance: Genrikas Zimanas, ‘Dėl veikėjo ir veikiamojo dalyko kilminiko vietos sakinyje’, *Gimtoji kalba* 2, 1933, pp. 24–26; G. Zimanas, ‘Keletas pasiūlimų teisinikams jų terminologijos reikalui’, *Gimtoji kalba* 3, 1933, pp. 35–38.

¹⁴ Saliamonas Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias. Nuo XIV amžiaus iki XX amžiaus pabaigos*. Vilnius: Alma littera, 1998. p. 149.

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from that of Latvia and Estonia where the number of students in Jewish and majority (Estonian and Latvian) schools steadily increased at the expense of formerly popular German and Russian-medium educational establishments.¹⁵

Along with linguists, writers, journalists and educators promoting Yiddish or Hebrew culture, a group of Jews emerged who not only were highly fluent in Lithuanian, but who made Lithuanian language and literature their profession: already mentioned have been Chackelis Lemchenas (a teacher of Lithuanian in the Yiddish gymnasium of Ukmergė—Vilkomir in Yiddish); later a renowned Lithuanian lexicographer Genrikas Zimanas (the teacher of Lithuanian in Kaunas Sholem-Aleykhem gymnasium and language planner); Chaimas Šapira (1895–1943), associated professor at Vytautas Magnus University, who wrote extensively on Lithuanian motifs in Jewish literature¹⁶; Benjaminas Sereiskis (1895–1972), an author of textbooks of Lithuanian and a lexicographer whose Lithuanian-Russian dictionary for a long time remained a standard reference book, to name just a few.¹⁷ Fiction and poetry written in Lithuanian by Jews emerged in the 1930s; this literature has not been investigated, and it is impossible to say at this point whether it differed from the mainstream Lithuanian literature in any respect or rather drifted towards a hyphenated type, i.e. Lithuanian-Jewish (in the way as we speak of Russian-Jewish literature).¹⁸ Thus, in a sense, Lithuanian was becoming a Jewish language, i.e. not only used for communication with the local majority but internalized by some sectors of the Jewish humanitarian intelligentsia.

In the 1920s, efforts were undertaken to launch a Lithuanian-language Jewish periodical, but with little success. The weekly *Mūsų garsas* (*Our voice*) appeared only in 1924–1925 as a supplement to the Yiddish-language Zionist paper *Yidishe Shtime* (*Jewish Voice*) (1919–s1940). Probably, at that time, a Lithuanian-language Jewish periodical could not compete for Jewish audience with numerous Yiddish-language newspapers and with the Lithuanian-language mainstream press. A more serious and a far more successful attempt at such a periodical was *Apžvalga* (*Review*), established by the Lithuanian Jewish Soldiers Association (*Lietuvos Žydų*

¹⁵ For Latvia see: Mendl Mark, *Di Yidish-veltlekhe shul in Letland*. New-York & Tel-Aviv: Ha-menora 1973, p. 267. For Estonia see: Samuel Gurin, *Juudi vāhemusrahvuse statistika Eestis*. Tallinn: Juudi Kultuuriomavalitsuse väljaanne, 1936. Tabels no 56, 59, 60.

¹⁶ Nachmanas Chaimas Šapira, 'Lietuva L. Neiduso kūryboje'. *Darbai ir dienos* 2, 1931, pp. 1–101; Nachmanas Chaimas Šapira, 'Lietuvos reikšmė naujajai žydų literatūrai'. *Darbai ir dienos* 3, 1934, pp. 91–129.

¹⁷ Benjaminas Sereiskis, *Lietuviškai-rusiškas žodynas*. Kaunas: A. Lapinas ir G. Volfas, 1933.

¹⁸ Saliamonas Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias*, p. 161.

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Karių Sajunga). The weekly publication appeared from 1935 until its abolishment in 1940 by the new Soviet authorities (223 issues was published altogether). It was a completely new type of Jewish periodical; and its novelty was not only in the usage of Lithuanian but also in the scope of topics considered.

***Apžvalga*: a new type of Jewish periodical**

Jewish periodicals in ‘non-Jewish’ languages are not a novelty. However, there is a difference between various non-Jewish languages, i.e. which languages at which period of time are acquired and internalized by Jews. As already argued, upwardly mobile Jews tended to use well-established prestigious languages like German and Russian and, to some extent, Polish. These languages became internalised to different degrees among Jews of Eastern Europe. Whatever the command of Lithuanian among Lithuanian Jewry, prior to independence this language had a purely instrumental value (i.e. it was needed for communication with the neighbours). Unlike ‘old’ standard languages, Lithuanian had yet to prove itself as a language of modern culture, education and state. As the previous discussion demonstrated, fluency in Lithuanian among Jews was achieved in a relatively short time. But the need for a Jewish periodical in Lithuanian goes beyond a necessity of command of the Lithuanian language and culture. It signals a kind of internalisation and even appropriation of the language.

Here, a closer comparison to other Baltic countries is necessary. Latvia and Estonia were witnessing an increase of students in Jewish and majority language schools at the expense of German- and Russian-medium schools, whereas in Lithuania the number of students in Jewish schools started decreasing in the 1930s. Noteworthy is the establishment of a Jewish school with Lithuanian as a language of instruction in Kaunas in 1933. Apparently, in Latvia and Estonia there was no need to organize a specific Jewish space in the majority language: Jewish students entered the mainstream schools, contributed to mainstream periodicals etc, if such a wish or necessity occurred. Thus, the creation of a Jewish periodical in Lithuanian and a Lithuanian-medium Jewish school in Kaunas reflected a rather different trend.

One can ask what the purposes of *Apžvalga* weekly and the target audience were. As the contributions and greetings on the occasion of the 3rd anniversary of the paper show, editorial boards (and, maybe, also the reading public) of Yiddish-language periodicals had been sceptical about the very idea of such a periodical. Some thought that the paper would enhance

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‘assimilation’, others were afraid that it would exclusively turn into a tool for apologetics and fighting anti-Semitism¹⁹. By 1938, it became clear that *Apžvalga* had established itself as a respected weekly. Whether it enhanced assimilation, is difficult or even impossible to say because of the unclear meaning of the term. In any case, it did not become a mere platform of outward propaganda and struggle against anti-Semitism.

The intended audience of the paper was both Jewish and Lithuanian. Indeed, *Apžvalga* dedicated some space to Jewish culture, customs, and history and also to responses to various (often incorrect) claims about Jews in the Lithuanian press (especially in the periodical *Verslas*, a stronghold of economic anti-Semitism). It was emphasized that first-hand knowledge about Jews, their customs and culture was crucial because there was plenty of disinformation, distorted accidentally or deliberately.²⁰ On the other hand, *Apžvalga* published speeches of and interviews with state officials, overviews of Jewish communities in the world, and also pieces of Lithuanian-language poetry written by Jewish authors. In the editorial of the very first issue it was taken as a fact that the target audience was Jews who read Lithuanian and who loved the Lithuanian language and culture.²¹ Thus, not a mere ability to read in the language was implied here, for all minority schools had compulsory study of Lithuanian. Rather, it is understood that the target audience was Jews who participated in/consumed Lithuanian culture (in addition to other possible languages and cultures). The rapprochement between Jews and Lithuanians was viewed as a crucial objective.

What makes the story of *Apžvalga* especially relevant is that, being a Jewish newspaper, it nonetheless differed from Yiddish-language periodicals in scope and sometimes in views. Regarding important problems facing Lithuanian Jewry, the paper took a middle of the road position. It did not express a clear stand on the Hebrew-Yiddish controversy and did not take sides in the heated discussions between Hebraists and Yiddishists. In articles, the reader would frequently find a general reference *žydu* ‘Jewish’ without singling out Yiddish or Hebrew, or a preference of one over the other. In today’s terms, we would say that *Apžvalga* opted for an all-inclusive approach, that is, support of any expression of Jewish identity in order to preserve the integrity of the Jewish community and to avoid a split along Hebraist-Yiddishist or secular-

¹⁹ See the article by A. Grinbergas, editor in chief of the Yiddish-language news paper *Dos vort*, on the occasion of the 3rd anniversary of *Apžvalga*: A. Grinbergas, ‘Tarp Scilos ir Charibdos’, *Apžvalga* 1 July 1938, no 25 (144), p. 2.

²⁰ See the editorial in the first issue: ‘Mūsų tikslai’, *Apžvalga*, 16 June 1935, no 1, p. 1.

²¹ ‘Mūsų tikslai’, *Apžvalga*, 16 June 1935, no 1, p. 1.

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traditionalist lines. The debate on the character of the Jewish community and the standpoint of *Apžvalga* exemplifies this: *Apžvalga* advocated an ethno-confessional basis of the community and not a purely religious or purely ethnic one, thus seeking a balanced that would satisfy everybody.²²

Probably, patriotism and language questions or, as we would call it today, language policy issues were the most frequent topics covered in the paper. Several issues were constantly discussed: Jews as alleged speakers of Russian/Russifiers of Lithuania, the teaching of Lithuanian language and literature in Jewish schools, foreign languages in Jewish schools, Jews as legitimate teachers of Lithuanian as a foreign language, etc. Sometimes matters of Lithuanian corpus planning that had no apparent connection with Jews or Jewish speakers of Lithuanian were analysed.²³ The topic of teaching Lithuanian to Jews remains beyond the scope of the present article and requires separate research.²⁴ In what follows, I will deal with (1) the discussion of Russian, (2) questions on proficiency in Lithuanian and (3) the discussion of the role of Lithuanian language and culture for Jews.

Prior to Lithuanian independence urban dwellers did not speak Lithuanian but Polish, Russian and, to some extent, German. As a tiny Jewish minority within the urban population went along with this trend, the stereotype of Jews as Russian-speakers prevailed well into the independence era. Interestingly, at the beginning of the 20th century a fervent Zionist and creator of the Revisionist Zionist movement Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky (1880–1940) warned upwardly mobile Jews about the tensions that may subsequently arise between Jews as Russian-speakers and advocates of Russian culture, and the oppressed peoples of the Russian Empire struggling against Russification.²⁵ Although, the mass of Lithuanian Jews was Yiddish-speaking, the small Russian-speaking minority was probably salient. To a lesser extent, Jews were considered as Polish-speakers, and the contributor to *Apžvalga* working under the pen-name Iksas attempted to clarify this misunderstanding in the paper, explaining that the Jewish shopkeeper accused of 'Polonization' was in fact talking to a Polish-speaking client.²⁶

²² Igrekas, 'Kodėl mes norime tautiškai tikibinės bendruomenės?' *Apžvalga*, 7 May 1937, no 17 (89), p. 2.

²³ M. Naivedelis, 'Daugiau aiškumo', *Apžvalga*, 28 November 1937, no 43 (115), p. 3.

²⁴ Some details on the topic and a case study are provided in: Anna Verschik, 'The first textbook of Lithuanian for Yiddish-speakers'.

²⁵ Владимир Жаботинский, 'Фальсификация школы', in: Владимир Жаботинский, *Избранное*. Иерусалим: Библиотека Алия, 1989, pp. 124-134 (133).

²⁶ Iksas, 'Pastabos', *Apžvalga*, 7 May 1937, no 17 (89), p. 6.

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Apžvalga dedicated a lot of time and space to dissociation from Russian language and imperial ideologies. At the same time, distancing from Russian was strongly linked to the discussion of proficiency in Lithuanian. Interestingly, only occasionally was it stated that actually the majority of Jews spoke Yiddish.²⁷

It appears logical that proponents of Yiddish/Hebrew as the symbol of a modern Jewish people would distance themselves from Russian too; however, their emphasis would be on Yiddish/Hebrew as a/the national language of Jews and not on other languages. It would be instructive to investigate what similarities and differences in dissociation from Russian and other 'big' languages existed in Jewish language periodicals and *Apžvalga*.

Contributors often stressed that only a tiny fraction of the older generation used Russian. Notably, the writer under the pen-name R. Uteniškis even provided statistics, claiming that only 5 % of the Jewish population used Russian. I am able neither to identify the source of this figure nor to estimate its precision. In the same article, Uteniškis called for mutual understanding between Jews and Lithuanians, as well as distancing from Russian ('we understand that Russian sounds unpleasant to the Lithuanian ear, the same is valid for the Jewish intelligentsia'); he also stated that Lithuanian was becoming more widespread among the broad Jewish masses ('*vis daugiau plinta plačiose žydu masėse*').²⁸

A fascinating attempt to classify the declining group of Russian-speaking Jews was undertaken by I.M. in the article with a symptomatic title *Mes kalbame rusiškai?* ('Do we speak Russian?').²⁹ (S)he drew a parallel between 'high societies' of Jews and those other peoples, Lithuanians included, claiming that speaking a foreign language is a characteristic of the 'cream' ('*grietinėle*') who despises their own people. The author condemned the role of Jews as Polonizers/Russifiers by saying that if a Jew speaks Polish in a Ukrainian/Belarusian environment, it harms the local peoples. However, the question is how many Jews in reality spoke Russian. The three categories, according to I.M., were as follows. There was a tiny minority for whom Russian was indeed their mother tongue. For a segment of the intelligentsia Russian was not merely a language, but a representation of a certain spirituality (in reality, these Jews knew Yiddish but valued Russian culture and literature). For I.M., the third group was

²⁷ R. Uteniškis, 'Reikia savitarpio supratimo', *Apžvalga*, 3 June 1935, no 3, p. 2. Most probably, Uteniškis is a pen-name referring to the town Utena.

²⁸ R. Uteniškis, 'Reikia savitarpio supratimo'.

²⁹ I. M., 'Mes kalbame rusiškai?', *Apžvalga*, 10 January 1936, no 2 (22), p. 5.

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mostly unpleasant. These were wealthy people who tended to envy those occupying a higher position and just imitated them. They deliberately used foreign languages in public places—theatres, cafés, buses, and so on. Still, according to the author, all these groups were decreasing in number.

Similar ideas were expressed by Livšicas, who, in addition to dissociation from Russian, stressed the increasing knowledge of Lithuanian among Jews and the growing number of Jews who were experts in Lithuanian language and culture.³⁰ Again, distancing from Russian as a former imperial language was closely linked to proof of proficiency in Lithuanian.

According to S., the author of the article ‘Šiek-tiek kantrybės’ (‘A little patience’), poor command of Lithuanian is characteristic of older urban Jews only, while in little towns and *shtetls* all generations have at least a working command of Lithuanian.³¹ The author states that it is only a matter of time until satisfactory proficiency in Lithuanian would become general. The paper did not abandon the topic and similar arguments appeared throughout.³²

A similar opinion was presented even more expressively on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of *Apžvalga*:

‘Lietuvoje šiandien jau visai necharakteringos tos poniutės, kurios atitrūkusių nuo savo kamieno kalba tarp savęs rusiškai, arba tie senos kartos likučiai, kurie neįstengia išmokti lietuviškai, o tūkstančiai jaunų ir vidutinio amžiaus ‘Apžvalgos’ ir kitų lietuviškų laikraščių ir lietuviškų knygų skaitytojai.’³³

‘Neither these dames who have drifted away from their roots and speak Russian among themselves, nor the remnants of the older generations who are unable to learn Lithuanian, but thousands of young and middle-aged readers of *Apžvalga* and other Lithuanian papers are characteristic of Jewish life in Lithuania today.’

Needless to say, a working command of a language and a profound knowledge of that language and culture are different matters. While *Apžvalga* resolutely rejected accusations expressed from time to time in the Lithuanian press of poor knowledge of Lithuanian among ‘the dominant minority’ (this is how J.S. refers to Jews in the paper), the need for closer contact

³⁰ Livšicas, ‘Dėl rusų kalbos vartojimo žydų tarpe’, *Apžvalga*, 25 October 1936, no 38 (63), p. 5. (No first name or initial indicated).

³¹ S., ‘Šiek-tiek kantrybės’, *Apžvalga*, 11 June 1937, no 22 (94), p. 5.

³² L. Bangauskas, ‘Kultūriniai rūpesčiai ir nekultūrinės aliuzijos’, *Apžvalga*, 23 April 1939, no 16 (179), p. 5.

³³ ‘Ketverių metų proga’, *Apžvalga*, 02 July 1939, no 25 (196), p. 2.

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between Jews and Lithuanians was acknowledged.³⁴ Thus, in the article '*Kultūriniai rūpesčiai ir nekultūrinės aliuzijos*' ('Cultural concerns and uncultured allusions') the author L. Bangauskas claimed that whereas co-operation between Jewish and Lithuanian literati was a well-known fact, it should become more intensive and regular.³⁵

Thus the paper advocated more than just proficiency in the state language. *Apžvalga* viewed its role not only as a mediator of Jewish culture to Lithuanians but also as a means of popularizing Lithuanian language and culture. In the programmatic article the author (using a telling pen-name 'Litvakas'—that is, Litvak, a Jew whose roots are in the historic Grand Duchy of Lithuania) argued that Jews had historically played a role of mediators between different cultures and peoples and that this important function should not be abandoned. What is more, in the words of Litvakas, the fact that non-Lithuanians used Lithuanian for certain cultural purposes should be flattering to the Lithuanian mainstream. Thanks to *Apžvalga*, Lithuanian had become a *lingua franca* in communication between different minorities. Thus, the author viewed Jews positively as a Lithuanising force in society. According to Litvakas, the most important issue here was free will: 'we made a free choice to create a forum in the state language'.³⁶

Several articles in *Apžvalga* fostered the idea that Jews were proficient and legitimate users/teachers of Lithuanian. Thus, arguing against the claim made by M. Stonys that the teaching of Lithuanian in minority schools was in a poor state because of the lack of adequately trained teachers, the anonymous author stated that Jewish teachers of Lithuanian were as good as Lithuanian (that is, native-speaking) teachers of the language. M. Stonys did not mention Jews or Jewish schools in particular but referred to minority schools in general. However, Jews were the largest minority in Lithuania and that is probably the reason why the anonymous author took the trouble to respond. The author explained that a couple of erroneous examples from students' copybooks are an insufficient basis for solid conclusions. (S)he strongly disagreed with Stonys as far as the ideal of a native speaker as a language teacher is concerned, and developed the idea that

³⁴ J.S. 'Dėl lietuvių kalbos teisių Lietuvoje', *XX amžius*, no 122, 3 June 1937, p. 3.

³⁵ L. Bangauskas, 'Kultūriniai rūpesčiai ir nekultūrinės aliuzijos'.

³⁶ Litvakas, 'Apžvalgos reikšmė lietuviams', *Apžvalga*, 1 July 1938, no 25 (144), p. 7.

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a non-Lithuanian teacher had certain advantages because (s)he knows the background of the students and was able to explain Lithuanian grammar even better.³⁷

Needless to say, in every situation of massive language acquisition there is a high probability that certain strata of the mainstream will argue against ‘appropriation’ (for instance, by claiming that the new group has not acquired the language properly and, by using ‘improper’ languages, is ‘contaminating’ the ‘pure’ variety).³⁸ In modern sociolinguistics and studies of bilingualism, some scholars argue against comparison to monolingual native speaker and even against the term ‘second language learner’, substituting the latter with ‘second language user’ because a bilingual person is a speaker in his/ her own right and not an imperfect copy of an idealized monolingual native speaker.³⁹ As mentioned above, we do not know much about the history and ideologies of teaching Lithuanian as a second language; in any case, it is safe to claim that such a view of bilingual speakers appears as very modern even today.

In a sense, one can speak of the internalisation of Lithuanian or even of a symbolic ‘appropriation’ of Lithuanian by Jews. The term ‘appropriation’ was employed by Estraiikh in the title of his paper on language shift among Russian Jews.⁴⁰ Compared to the situation of Russian or Polish among Polish Jews, the process of the internalisation of Lithuanian was in its initial stages in the mid-1930s.

A wider perspective: polysystem theory

As has been shown, by the 1930s Lithuanian Jewry had become more diverse as far as cultural orientation, ideology, and linguistic repertoire were concerned. The role of Lithuanian language and culture grew not only because Lithuanian was the state language and a compulsory subject in schools but also because it was gradually internalized by some Jews.

As Chone Shmeruk notes, speaking of Polish Jewry, a predominant tendency is to view and analyse isolated Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish cultural systems. However, this approach is reductionist because it analyses each sphere (education, literature, theatre etc.) in each language

³⁷ ‘Lietuvių kalba mažumų mokyklose’, *Apžvalga*, 17 July 1938, no 27 (146), p. 1. In the article M. Stonys is erroneously referred to as V. Stonys; see M. Stonys, ‘Lietuvių kalbos rašomeji ir jų taisymas nelietuvių mokykloje’, *Gimtoji kalba*, 1938, no 6, p. 85–86.

³⁸ Bonny Norton, ‘Language, Identity, and the Ownership of English’, *TESOL Quarterly*, 1997, 31 (3), 409–429.

³⁹ Vivian Cook, ‘Interlanguage, multi-competence and the problem of the “second” language’. *Rivista di Psicolinguistica Applicata*, 2006, 6 (3), pp. 39–52.

⁴⁰ Gennady Estraiikh, ‘From Yiddish to Russian: a Story of Linguistic and Cultural Appropriation’.

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separately, ignoring the complexity and interdependence of these systems. Shmeruk employs the term ‘polysystem’ from literary studies, first proposed in 1978 by Itamar Even-Zohar.⁴¹

While a review on polysystem theory remains outside the scope of the present article, it should nevertheless be emphasized that the theory was formulated as a counter-reaction to naive positivism and rigid structuralism that equates the structuredness of a given system with homogeneity, stability and a-historicity. Transfer of cultural models, repertoires etc. is a normal, not an exclusive process. Transfer may result in conventionalization of innovations, which is called cultural interference.⁴²

In connection with Jewish culture in inter-war Poland, Shmeruk argues that the adoption of Polish language and culture does not boil down to the rejection of one’s Jewish identity and ‘assimilation’. He presents evidence that very few Jews strived for a total assimilation in the sense of a complete merger with the Polish people.⁴³ Those who increasingly used Polish, gradually created a new version of Jewish identity, not in line with the prevailing concepts of Jewish nationalism (via Yiddish or Hebrew), let alone traditional Jewishness.

While Hebrew and Yiddish cultural systems had an explicit ideological character and often made claims for exclusivity, the Polish cultural system among Jews did not draw on any particular ideology. This fact made the Polish cultural system less visible; nevertheless, Shmeruk demonstrates that Jews were effectively creating their own space through the means of Polish (as used in Jewish periodicals, literary collections, schools run entirely by Jews and for Jews, and so on). Shmeruk calls for caution in the interpretation of census data and statistics on mother tongue use because: (1) answers may be driven by the wish to express a certain identity and (2) multilingualism was widespread among Polish Jews.⁴⁴

Shmeruk mentions that the first Polish-language works of fiction written by Jews appeared in the second half of the 19th century. Compared to the situation in Poland, Lithuania lagged behind in this respect. I believe that, while the process of internalization of a non-Jewish language and culture by Jews (or, in other words, the transfer of a new cultural repertoire and the complication of the cultural system) was similar in the two countries, the pace and the scale

⁴¹ Chone Shmeruk, ‘Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture’, p. 285.

⁴² Itamar Even-Zohar, ‘Polysystem Theory (revised)’.

⁴³ Chone Shmeruk, ‘Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture’, p. 286.

⁴⁴ Chone Shmeruk, ‘Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture’, p. 289.

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differed. The difference in question may be explained by the different position of Polish and Lithuanian on the scale of relative attractiveness of non-Jewish languages for Jews.

A relative attractiveness may be represented as a continuum. Languages that represented well-established cultures held more prestige. Polish was probably between German and Russian, on the one hand, and the languages of the Baltic countries, on the other. True, Poland lost its independence as a result of partitions in the 18th century but nevertheless it had had enough time to establish its own literary tradition, literary language cultural expression and its own nobility. After 1918, Russian began to disappear from the repertoire of Polish Jews, except for those in the north-eastern regions.⁴⁵

Compared to that, in the second part of 19th century modern Lithuanian, along with Latvian and Estonian, was still in the making. While the Lithuanian state as a political entity had had a long history, by the time of national awakening Lithuanian language was not spoken by the nobility or urban dwellers. Apparently, historicity (i.e. the established tradition) is an important component of prestige and in the eyes of upwardly mobile Jews Lithuanian lacked it. As Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern elegantly puts it, ‘when Hungarians, Ukrainians [...], and Czechs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire abandoned their old state-oriented allegiances and construed their new loyalties along the nationalist lines, Jews found themselves among the last champions of the imperial’.⁴⁶

The pace of the development from peasant languages into the vehicles of modern Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian culture starting from the era of national awakening was indeed impressive but their firm establishment on a par with ‘old’ languages and cultures, let alone internalization by minorities (Jews included), required more time. As for Ukrainian and Belarusian, these languages served as a mean of communication with co-territorial populations but never for ‘high’ cultural functions.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Chone Shmeruk, ‘Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture’, p. 290.

⁴⁶ Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *The Anti-Imperial Choice: the Making of the Ukrainian Jew*. Yale: Yale University Press, 2009, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Shmeruk mentions only one writer of Jewish origin who started publishing in Belarusian before WW I, namely, Zmitrok Biadula (Shmuel Plavnik, 1886–1941), and no Jewish writers or poets working in Ukrainian before WW I), see: Chone Shmeruk, ‘Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A trilingual Jewish culture’, p. 288. However, in the view of evidence provided by Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, such literati, although marginal and hardly noticeable, did exist (for instance, Hryts’ko Kernerenko published in Ukrainian already before WW I), see: Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *The Anti-Imperial Choice: the Making of the Ukrainian Jew*, p. 20 ff.

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German/Russian Polish Lithuanian (Latvian? Estonian?) Ukrainian/Belarusian
More attractive ← → Less attractive

The question mark for Estonian and Latvian means that I cannot place these languages very well on the attractiveness scale for the following reasons: first, little has been written about Jewish-Latvian cultural contacts; and second, unlike in Lithuania and Poland, Latvia's Jewry has not produced many writers. A well known prolific writer of fiction and essays Mark Razumni (1896–1988) wrote in Yiddish and translated Latvian literature (the poetry of Jānis Rainis and stories by Ādolfs Alunāns)⁴⁸; as for Estonia, Jewry was very tiny and lacked writers/poets working in whatever language. Only a couple of Estonian writers of Jewish descent appeared after WW II.

While the Jewish press in Polish was much richer in number and scope than the Jewish press in Lithuanian, nevertheless, *Apžvalga* played a similar role. In the terms of polysystem theory, Jewish culture in Lithuania was in the process of adopting new elements from a new cultural system (Lithuanian) and creating a new cultural repertoire. It remains to be investigated which elements were being transferred and whether and how Lithuanian-language literature and culture produced by Jews was different from the mainstream. Unfortunately, too little time was left for the new system to become fully developed and crystallized.

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⁴⁸ Josifs Šteimanis, *Latvijas ebreju vēsture*, Daugavpils: DPU, 1995. pp. 107–108.