

Yiddish Accent for *Indecent*

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*First and foremost, **intelligibility** is at the core of our work; followed closely by **authenticity**. If you cannot be understood by the audience, then all authenticity brought to the dialect is irrelevant. There will be moments when we make a choice that seems less authentic, but always for the purpose of clearer communication.*

Rehearse and sing in dialect. Memorize your text in dialect. Revisit sound clips periodically to tap back into the sound/feeling of the dialect. ASK QUESTIONS if you are not sure about anything!

PEOPLE / CULTURE / HISTORY:

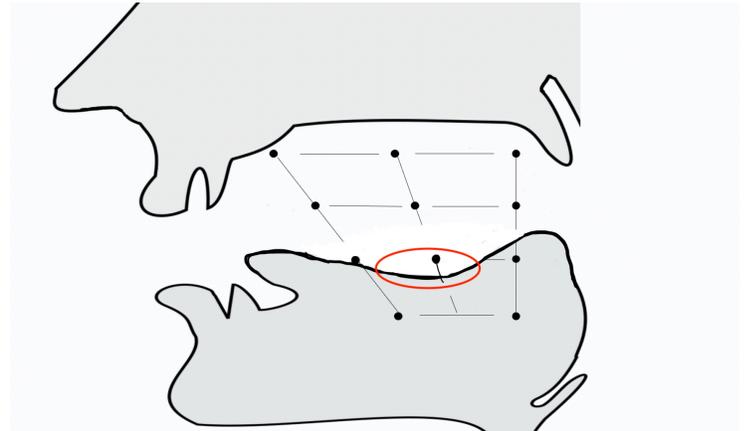
Yiddish literally translates into 'Jewish'. It is a language derived from multiple languages: Hebrew and German (primarily), but also the Slavic languages of Ukrainian, Polish, Lithuanian, Russian, Hungarian, and Romanian. It tends to have a great deal of German words, but is heavily shaped by Slavic grammar. While Hebrew remained the written language for a great period of time, Yiddish was developed in a widely accessible spoken language environment. Its origin is loosely pinpointed to the 9th century, but was not declared a national Jewish language until 1908.

With over 250 words for 'buy' or 'sell', there is a great bit of curiosity in how this language was invented or developed by traders. We recognize the ease of a multi-lingual language used in a spoken context and how that eventually became the reliable language for women in the home, who did not receive the education that men of the Jewish nation did. It is important to recognize that there is and always has been a great deal of bias towards this language. As the Jewish people were a migratory people (often times out of necessity), their move back West after Eastern persecution thickened the German presence in the symbiotic Hebrew/German root of Yiddish. This shift in the language decrease the power and prevalence of the Yiddish culture. In fact, Hebrew eventually won the title of *the* 'national language' because German was so prevalent in Yiddish.

Because there is a great deal of influence from multiple languages, and due to the fact that it is written in Hebrew character with various innovations from German and host languages, several spellings within Yiddish are considered current. The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research is still working towards a 'standardization.' There is a lot of room for play and variance with the multiple roles that require this accent. We will focus on the connection to Polish sounds, as many locations in the script refer to Poland. We will also uphold the Ukrainian flavor in honor the Yiddish Theatre tradition.

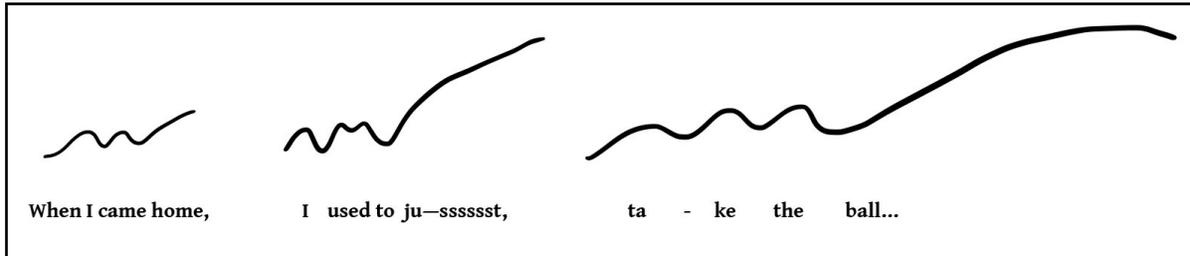
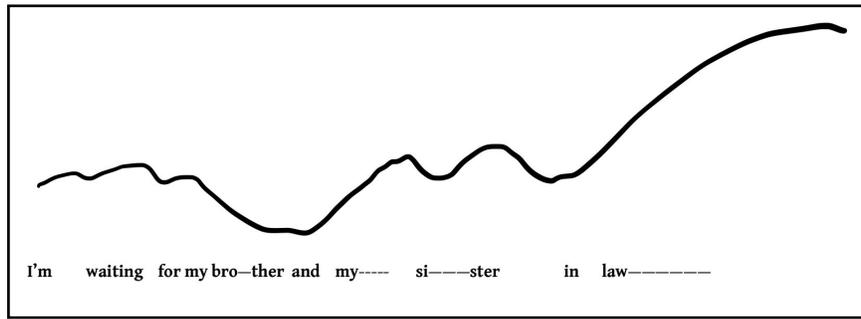
VOCAL POSTURE:

- **Food Image/Taste/Texture:**
Strawberry Candy resting on tongue // cough drop
- **Resting or thinking sound** is a in the middle of the tongue, just below 'equator' [ɜ] or even a flow along the shape of the tongue of [ɛəʊm].
- **Jaw:** held rather narrow; can easily open, but not terribly wide
- **Tongue:**
 - **tip/blade** rests behind bottom teeth with great ease and fluidity of darting to the upper teeth and alveolar ridge as needed
 - **body (front/middle)** slightly cupped below 'equator' tongue
 - **back** rests in the middle or slightly raised; raises frequently for fricative sounds; can also cup easily — there is a great ease of mobility in this region of the tongue
- **Lips:**
 - **corners** are held in neutral position, perhaps slightly retracted/wide - they do not move much
 - **body** is capable of a puckering fluidity, but tend to be economical with their motion
- **Velum:** fairly mobile in ability to lower for fricative sounds, but not the point of nasality presence
- **Possible Catch phrases:** 'Oy vey!' 'Dos iz mayn mame-lushn' - **this is my mother tongue**

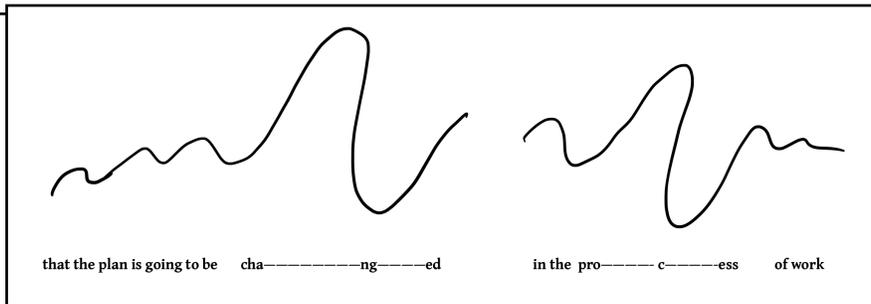
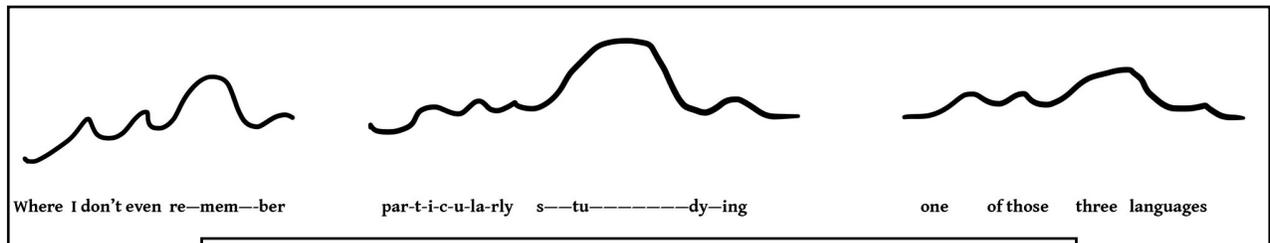


PROSODY: Rhythm, Stress, Intonation, Tone

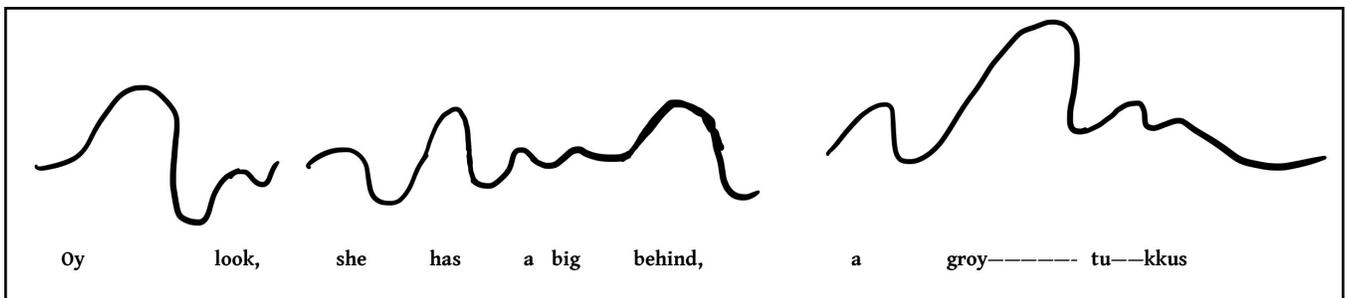
- Stress tends to fall on the **first syllable** (varying from German). When Hebrew is more present, there is a possibility for stress finding its landing on a final or penultimate syllable.
- This onset stress can lend to a strong **knocking quality** to this foreign language accent and greater **equality of syllable length** the thicker the accent lives within an individual.
- Additionally, Yiddish offers elision in a strong use of fricatives, threading together these stressed/knocking sounds in a streamlined flow.
- **3 Notable Patterns:**
 - **THE PATTERN AND LIFT:** builds through phrase with limited pitch range and rapid tempo until end of phrase where it lengthens on vowel and lifts upward in pitch — *tiddle-babble-baowa* (lifting pitch slide)



- THE PATTERN AND DROP: builds through phrase with limited pitch range and rapid tempo until end of phrase where it lengthens on vowel and lifts upward in pitch — *tiddle-tiddle-ding-dong* (downward pitch slide)



- THE ROLLING WAVE: The phrasing washes over the ear with a lead into lengthened, growing volume, pitch variance towards the middle/end of a phrase, then falling back to a similar starting place.



PRONUNCIATION / SOUND CHANGES:

Consonants — all velarized back mouth consonants have a **STRONG** fricative action (i.e. [k/g/x]). With this fricative tendency, there is a great presence of the affricates [tʃ / dʒ] in this language.

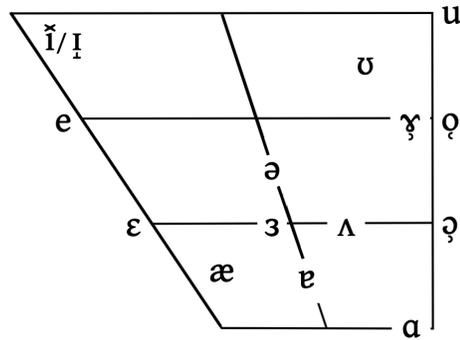
- **ï → ʀ / ʀ / x**
 - The /r/ sound in Yiddish is unique and can vary greatly depending on thickness of accent and emphasis of the word within a phrase. It can often be rolled (this is most common post-vocalic or after a vowel), tapped/flapped (most common), a velar fricative (fairly common), or in the case of someone who has been influenced by English greatly, it can be a light-rhotic sound similar to what we are used to hearing today. (*Rifkele, hardly, tomorrow, script, fork, Reina is from Varsovie*)
- **h → x / χ** — The /h/ sound is often lengthened, becoming a velar or uvular fricative (*happy, hair, hoped, holy, How healthy is the rain?*)
- **θ/ð → t̪ / d̪** — Both the un/voiced /th/ sounds (alveolar fricatives) tend to become plosives created with the tip of the tongue on the top teeth (dentalized). In thicker accents and more Germanic based accents, the ending /-th/ sounds can frequently be spoken as an /s/ or /z/. (*Thinking, thirsty, healthy, // There, them, other, smoothest // Endings can be either t/s sound: cloth, bath, beneath // Endings can be either d/z sound: bathe, beathe Pass the fork // They don't like the thought of it. She is thirsty and cannot breathe.*)
- **l → lʷ** — the /l/ sound become velarized, moving the back dorsum towards the velum in the mouth, similar to the action most American English speakers do when saying the word PULL (versus the tip of the tongue rising action in the work LIKE). This is heavily used in nearly all /l/ occurrences. (*Lemml, leap, look, impossible, He should idolize me*)
- **w → v / ʋ** — As is common in German, this /w/ sound starting a word/syllable will become a /v/ or a approximate version of the labio-dental /v/ (*where, wanting, questions, away, He wants one for work.*)
- **/-ing/ → -ɪŋ^k** — Words that end in -ing (i.e. fishing) will be release the nasal with a slight /k/ sound (*fi shing, wishing, booking, She will be looking*)

Practice Sentences

- *The happiest day was that time Reina was looking.*
- *Where are those hair brushes?*
- *They are overworking themselves.*

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t̪ d̪					k g			
Nasal	m			n				ŋ			
Trill				r					(ʀ)		
Tap or Flap				ɾ							
Fricative		f v		s z	ʃ ʒ			x	(χ)		h
Lateral fricative				t̪ l̪							
Approximant		(v)		ɹ			j				
Lateral approximant				lʷ							

Yiddish English Vowels



Vowels & Diphthongs

Lexical Set Keyword	Yiddish	Description // Additional Words
KIT & FLEECE	ĩ	Both of these sounds move closer to the other, but most notable are the FLEECE words moving into KIT territory: <i>(kid, milk, sister, women, business // agree, seed, people, meat, scene)</i> <i>IF you want the SEED, you cannot BE SILLY.</i> <i>WE cannot touch the CEILING.</i>
LOT/CLOTH/ THOUGHT	ɐ	These back, open-mid rounded sounds can shift slightly forward or move all the way towards the middle of the mouth: <i>(stop, pot, box // soft, loss, horrid // taught, daughter, fall)</i> <i>Don't COUGH at ALL in there!</i> <i>He GOT the WRONG COFFEE.</i> <i>Don't get CAUGHT BORROWING!</i>
STRUT/GOOSE merger into FOOT	ʊ	In this merger, the close and open-mid back vowels can tend to move closer toward one another in the close/close-mid arching in the back, such as in the word FOOT. This can be attributed to spelling with the letter 'u': <i>(cup, run, flood, love // spoon, two, prove, youth)</i> <i>The YOUNG MOTHER dressed in BLUE.</i>
FOOT → GOOSE	ʊ	This can be a characteristic of over-correcting in attempt to assimilate into more of an English/American sound: <i>(Brush, full, should, woman)</i> <i>The WOMAN COULD eat if she WOULD COOK.</i>

SQUARE	ɔə	<p>This diphthong has a tendency to be lengthened and sometimes chopped into separate syllabic phthongs:</p> <p><i>(care, their, scarce, player)</i> <i>Breathe the AIR.</i> <i>The HAIR will change THERE.</i></p>
GOAT	ʌ / o	<p>This diphthong can often be kept elongated on the onset vowel only:</p> <p><i>(oak, so, holy, robe, know, sew)</i> <i>DON'T THROW the HOLY SCROLL!</i> <i>He's out of CONTROL!</i></p>

Listening Suggestions

Play with these sounds! The technical work is important, but don't let it dictate the sounds you are making. Test the boundaries and find the flow of the prosody.

- IDEA - the International Dialects of English Archives: this is a highly valuable resource for any dialect sampling. Here is a list of a few folks who have strong Yiddish backgrounds or who's accent is similar to what we are striving for with Yiddish:
 - Israel 1 (male, 42, great for all elements): <https://www.dialectsarchive.com/israel-1>
 - Israel 5 (male, 50, strong NY, US influence, great for prosody and subtle OP/Salient Sounds): <https://www.dialectsarchive.com/israel-5>
 - Poland 2 (female, 40, great for onset syllable emphasis and salient sounds): <https://www.dialectsarchive.com/poland-2>
 - Poland 8 (female, 25, great upward rise at end of phrase, nice thinking sound modeling) <https://www.dialectsarchive.com/poland-8>
- My YouTube playlist: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPZg3qYyXag6nDRSV3RQFdkOfYB5nBKzG>
- Yiddish Podcast (in Yiddish): <https://ingeveb.org/blog/vaybertaytsh-and-dos-yidishe-kol>
- Interview w/ Yiddish actress Ida Kaminska (in Yiddish) and her granddaughter Diana Halpern (some traces of the accent we are playing with): <https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/programs/interview-ida-kaminska>

Online Resource:

<https://www.briannetaylorvoiceworks.com/yiddish>

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