EYDES Conference
"Jiddisch und die Mitte Europas"

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Discussion of experts

Working paper
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Contents:

1 Preliminaries

The EYDES archive is being launched in the Internet. Constructing it we were inspired by the following ideas:

a) The tape collection with its original sound -the voices of the informants and witnesses- should 'come to life'.
b) Potential users should be able to access, navigate, handle and analyze the vast mass of sound.
c) The electronic archive should serve as a Yiddish language repository fully meeting the requirements demanded of a culture archive.
d) The archive collection has great value for the broad public. European societies in particular have a need to fill their gap in knowledge about Yiddish as an integral component of European culture.

These guidelines make it clear that while our methodology is primarily linguistically and IT-driven the undertaking as a whole is motivated by culture-political aspects.

2 EYDES at the present

In implementing our goals we had to make a number of decisions which have defined the shape of the archive. Over the years we presented and discussed them at various occasions with the relevant bodies of the academic community.
In the upcoming colloquium we want to summarize those decisions again and demonstrate their implications. While discussing them with you we want to evaluate the archive as it now stands, confirm or correct developments up to now and recommend measures to stimulate its employment in various sectors of public life.

The following principles constitute the core of EYDES:

2.1   The original sound as the main authority
The most central task is to provide direct access to the sound of the interview collection.

2.2   Meaningful navigation
The vast mass of around 5400 hours of original sound has to be broken down and organized in a meaningful way in order to serve users' interests. Using the archive a user should be able to navigate along transparent and stimulating paths.

2.2.1 Organizing criteria
A first organizing criterion is provided by the structuring principles of the original fieldwork: geographic location and question of the questionnaire.

a) The 'question' enables users to follow the linguistic and cultural intentions that motivated the original Weinreich- investigation.

b) The 'location' enables users to pursue their own points of interest while accessing the former spaces of Yiddish speakers - looking into the wide range of geographic and social variation, or establishing clues that throw light on the former homes of family and friends.

A second organizing criterion is delivered through the words emerging in the interviews. They allow access to the sound from a content perspective or from linguistic angles – apart from the original intentions of the fieldwork initiative. For this reason, the interviews were transcribed; the indexes generated on the basis of the occurring words serve as paths into the original sound. Starting from each indexed word all instances in which it is used can be reached.

c) We decided to transcribe the interviews in Standard Yiddish (mostly YIVO orthography). In this way form and meaning of the indexed words are transparent to every Yiddish speaker and can be derived via dictionaries by non-natives and non-linguists.

d) In addition to the original Yiddish right-to-left orthography we decided to present the word index also in a version with Latin letters (the internationally used YIVO- Romanization). That way persons without reading knowledge of Yiddish can use the index and reach an approximate understanding via the combination with other languages.

2.2.2 Public Laboratory

As meaning is constituted by the context we added another component to the EYDES archive. Retrieval via single words is expanded through a laboratory allowing for a context-based statistical analysis of the archive texts. The laboratory works on the basis of the interview transcripts, i.e. statistical analysis is achieved via the written text (the 'symbols'), not via the original sound (the 'signals').

a) Users can select archive locations and compare conspicuous word distribution in the interviews via statistical procedures (conspicuous distribution referring to either relatively high or relatively low occurrence).

b) Users also can compute statistically based collocations of select words.

3 EYDES in the future

In Berlin we also want to exchange with you ideas on the future archive developments and propose to consider the following aspects:

3.1   Expanding the archive paths
   a) by integrating secondary indices on 'question' and 'location' (cf. Uriel Weinreich's „Index to the Dialectology" and „Subject Index to the Dialectology")
   b) by integrating secondary indices on the words (eg. translations into English, French, Russian, Hebrew; lematized indices; "Wortfeld" indices).

3.2   Expanding the possibilities for analysis
   a) by providing further statistical procedures (eg. automatic detection of language areas)
   b) by providing direct links from the results of the statistical procedures to the original sound
   c) by providing further user-friendly presentation forms of data extraction (eg. creating maps, generating local wordlists, compiling local word frequency)

3.3   Creating archive applications
The possibilities of creating archive applications are unlimited. Feasible are applications like our "Jiddischkurs" for example, Atlas and Beiheft volumes, editions of song materials, exploration of 'roots', tracing paths of European social movement, etc., towards
   a) learning and teaching
   b) conveying culture content
   c) entertaining purposes

3.4   Improvement of the archive presentation
It is desirable to keep improving the presentation of the archive in the Internet.

3.5   Including the users
This will be an exciting, interdisciplinary task for IT-specialists, culture activists and educators. Joint efforts are wanted towards involving users
   a) in the transcription process (i.e. to providing a transcription tool; delivering interview segments; integrating incoming new transcripts; guaranteeing quality control; presenting competing transcripts)
   b) in drawing on user knowledge of Yiddish (promoting the use of the archive and integrating user insights as further paths into the data
   c) in dialogue form during their archive access.

3.6   Including further archives
For comparative purposes it may be useful to include further Yiddish archives (new fieldwork, written resources, video archives).

3.7   Creating new interfaces
To contrast the Yiddish materials with coterritorial language data it is desirable to create interfaces to other electronic language archives (i.e. resources of German, Polish, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Rumanian etc.).

4 Today's state of the archive

The EYDES archive is under construction. Its appearance is improved on a day by day basis and therefore changing. We apologize for the inconvenience connected with the ongoing modification. The basic lines are stable, however, and will remain as they are. For your orientation we are listing tasks that are to be completed before the Berlin date at the opening screen - completed tasks will be marked as such.