Contents

The following Help Topics are available:

For Help on Help for Windows, press F1.
For Help on Help for Macintosh, select Help with Quick Help from the 🛈 menu .

Overview of Yiddish

Yiddish is spoken by about four million people, mostly Jews, all over the world, particularly in Argentina, Canada, France, Israel, Mexico, Romania and the United States. Prior to World War II, about 11 million people spoke it. Recently, many organizations devoted to preserving Yiddish have become active.

Yiddish developed about 1,000 years ago from a blend of German dialects. Its grammar is largely based on Medieval German, while its vocabulary comes from German, Hebrew, various Slavic languages and, recently, English.

The main dialects of Yiddish are Mideastern (also called Polish), Southeastern (Ukrainian) and Northeastern (Lithuanian). Attempts have been made to standardize Yiddish, and the standardized language blends aspects of the dialects.

Yiddish is generally written in Hebrew characters.

Alphabet

Yiddish uses the consonants of the Hebrew alphabet. However, the Yiddish alphabet adapts alphabet letters to serve as vowels while Hebrew vowels are represented by diacritical marks. In this program, the Yiddish is transliterated, that is, written using the Roman alphabet. The following chart gives the name of each character, the symbol used here for transliteration and an example of its pronunciation. The transliteration follows the standard established by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

Letter	Transliteration	Pronunciation
alef	none	silent, acts as a marker
pasekh alef	a	as in f**a**ther
komets alef	o	as in l**aw**
	u	as in p**u**t
beys	b	as in **b**oy
veys	v	as in **v**ery
giml	g	as in **g**ood
daled	d	as in **d**og
hey	h	as in **h**ouse
vov	u	as in b**oo**t
tsvey vovn	v	as in **v**ery
zayen	z	as in **z**oo
khes	kh	as in the German i**ch** (k with friction at the back of the throat.
tes	t	as in **t**op
yud	i	between the sounds of f**i**t and f**ee**t
		as in f**ee**t
tsvey yudn	ey	as in th**ey**
pasekh tsvey yudn	ay	as in h**i**
vov yud	oy	as in b**oy**
kof	k	as in **k**ite
lamed	l	as in **l**ike
mem	m	as in **m**ove
nun	n	as in **n**o
samekh	s	as in **s**ee
ayen	e	as in b**e**d
pey	p	as in **p**ay
fey	f	as in **f**ine
tsadik	ts	as in i**ts**
kuf	k	as in **k**ite
reysh	r	as in French (gargling sound at the back of the throat)
shin	sh	as in **sh**ow
sin	s	as in **s**ee
zayen shin	zh	as in mea**s**ure
daled zayen shin	dzh	as in **j**ump
tes shin	tsh	as in **ch**air
tof	t	as in **t**op
sof	s	as in **s**ee

Vowel sounds, particularly **ay**, **ey** and **oy**, may be pronounced differently by speakers of the different Yiddish dialects.

Nouns

A noun is a word that names a person, place, thing or idea.

mentsh (person)
Estr (Esther)
beygl (bagel)

See Also:
[Gender and Agreement](#)
[Number and Agreement](#)
[Declensions](#)
[Pronouns](#)

Gender and Agreement

Nouns in Yiddish are either masculine (m.), feminine (f) or neuter (n.). Nouns ending in **-izm**, **-l**, **-n**, **-em** and **-er** are generally masculine. Nouns ending in **-ut**, **-ay** and **-kit** are generally feminine. Nouns ending in **-g** and **-tum** are generally neuter.

tish m. (table)
tokhter f. (daughter)
hoyz n. (house)

See also:
Adjectives
Articles
Pronouns

Number and Agreement

Yiddish generally has both singular and plural forms.   While there are patterns for different noun endings, it is best to learn the plural form of a noun when you learn it.

Common plural endings include **-n**, **-en**, **-es** and **-im**.

gas	street	**gasn**	streets
kave	coffee	**kaves**	coffees
ey	egg	**eyer**	eggs

Sometimes the last syllable of the noun changes in the plural.

dokter	doctor	**doktoyrim**	doctors

Certain words do not change in the plural.

ferd	horse	**ferd**	horses
vegetarier	vegetarian	**vegetarier**	vegetarians

See also:
- Nouns
- Pronouns
- Adjectives
- Articles

Declensions

Yiddish noun phrases have declensions, which means they vary according to the role of the noun phrase in the sentence. Yiddish has three cases: nominative (subject), accusative (object of an action), dative (object of a preposition). Unlike in some other languages, Yiddish nouns do not generally change with the different cases; however, pronouns, definite articles and adjectives do.

See Also

    Pronouns

    Adjectives

    Articles

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that stands for a previously mentioned (or understood) noun. Yiddish pronouns, like adjectives and definite articles, change according to their case.

Nominative

ikh	I
du	you (familiar)
ir	you (formal)
er	he
zi	she
me, men	we, one, people
es, se	it
mir	we
ir	you
zey	they

Accusative

mikh	me
dikh	you (familiar)
aykh	you (formal)
em	him
zi	her
es	it
undz	us
aykh	you
zey	they

Dative

mir	me
dir	you (familiar)
aykh	you (formal)
em	him
ir	her
undz	us
aykh	you
zey	they

Es (it) does not occur in the dative case.

See Also:

Declensions

Articles

Definite Articles

Singular definite articles change according to their declension

	Nominative	**Accusative**	**Dative**
Masculine	der	dem	dem
Feminine	di	di	der
Neuter	dos	dos	dem

There is only one plural definite article: **di**.

Indefinite Articles

To express the indefinite article (a or an), Yiddish uses **a** for words starting with consonants and **an** for words starting with a vowel.

See Also:
> Nouns
> Gender and Agreement
> Number and Agreement
> Declensions

Adjectives

Singular adjectives take different endings according to the case and gender of the noun they modify.

gut (good)

	Nominative	**Accusative**	**Dative**
Masculine	gutr	gutn	gutn
Feminine	gute	gute	gutr
Neuter	gute	gute	gutn

Plural adjectives have only one form:

Singular	**Plural**
gut	gut**e**

Adjectives generally precede the noun.

See Also:
> Gender and Agreement
> Number and Agreement
> Articles

Adverbs

Adverbs are words that modify verbs, adjectives and other adverbs.

Many Yiddish adverbs are formed by adding a special ending, **erheyt**, to an adjective.

shtil	quiet	**shtilerheyt**	quietly

Other adverbs have the same form as the adjective.

pamelekh	slow	**pamelekh**	slowly

Here are some common adverbs that do not come from adjectives.

efsher	maybe
Er komt **efsher**.	He may come.
take	really
Zey veysn **take**.	They really know.

Other frequently used adverbs include **fri** (early), **shoyn** (already) and **shpet** (late).

See Also:
      <u>Adjectives</u>

Verbs

Verbs in Yiddish conjugate, which means they change according to the number and person of the noun that is acting. Almost all Yiddish verbs take the same endings; however, there are some exceptions.

Present tense

zogn (to say)

Ikh zog	I say
Du zogst	You [fam.] say
Ir zogt	You [for.] say
Er/zi zogt	He/she says
Me zogt	One says/It is said
Mir zogn	We say
Ir zogt	You [plural] say
Zey zogn	They say

Past tense

To form the past tense, most verbs combine the present tense of the verb **hobn** (to have) with the past participle of the main verb.

zogn (to say)

Ikh hob gezogt	I said
Du host gezogt	You [fam.] said
Ir hot gezogt	You [for.] said
Er/zi hot gezogt	He/she said
Me hot gezogt	One said/It was said
Mir hobn gezogt	We said
Ir hot gezogt	You said
Zey hobn gezogt	They said

A small number of verbs use the present tense of **zayn** (to be) instead of **hobn** (to have).

Future tense

The future tense is formed by combining the conjugated verb **veln** (will, shall) with the infinitive).

Ikh vel	I will
Du vest	You (fam.) will
Ir vet	You (for.) will
Er vet	He will
Zi vet	She will
Mvet	We will/People will/One will
Mir veln	We will
Ir vet	You will
Zey veln	They will

Mir veln zagn. (We will say.)

Prepositions

Prepositions are the connecting words that show the relationships between words in the sentence. Nouns, pronouns, noun phrases, gerunds or noun clauses can be the complement of prepositions.

Simple prepositions in Yiddish include:

tsu   to
fun   from
mit   with
on   without
in   in
oyf   on

Often, the preposition combines with the article that follows it, forming a contraction.

Ikh vil tsukumen **tsum** fliplats. (I want to go to the airport.)
Tsu gey ikh **in** der rikhtiker rikhtung? (Am I going in the right direction?)
Er is **oyf** vakatsie. (He is on vacation.)

Noun phrases that are the object of a preposition will take the dative case.

See Also:
    Declensions

Conjunctions

Conjunctions join words, phrases and clauses together.

un (and)
Mayn kostum **un** mayn vaybs kleyd darfnem presn.
(My suit and my wife's dress need ironing.)

Other common conjunctions in Yiddish include:

aver	but
oder	or
oyv, az, ven	if
vayl	because
vi	as, like