



HAL
open science

Naftali Naymanovich and the first Esperanto textbook for Yiddish speakers (1888)

Denis Eckert

► **To cite this version:**

Denis Eckert. Naftali Naymanovich and the first Esperanto textbook for Yiddish speakers (1888). East European Jewish Affairs, 2025, <10.1080/13501674.2025.2564410>. <hal-04684437>

HAL Id: hal-04684437

<https://hal.science/hal-04684437v1>

Submitted on 22 Oct 2025

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 - Attribution - Non-commercial use - No Derivative Works - International License

***Naftali Naymanovich and the first Esperanto textbook
for Yiddish speakers (1888)***

published by *East European Jewish Affairs* (2025)
DOI: 10.1080/13501674.2025.2564410

Denis ECKERT

– UMR 8504 Géographie-cités, Campus Condorcet, 5 cours des Humanités, F-93322 Aubervilliers (Cedex)
– Centre Marc Bloch, Friedrichstraße 191, D-10117 Berlin
ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6512-2197>

D. Eckert is a human geographer and research director at the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS). He is the author of works on the global circulation of knowledge and languages. He is currently conducting research on the global spread of Esperanto in the first decades of its existence, with a focus on Esperanto activism in the Yiddish-speaking world before 1939.

ABSTRACT

The publication of the first Esperanto textbook in Yiddish in Warsaw in 1888, just one year after the birth of the language, is a remarkable event, but one that is practically unknown. Its author, Naftali Naymanovich (1843–1898), a journalist and writer known to specialists in Yiddish culture and the Jewish press, wrote a text which, unlike the texts of L. L. Zamenhof, the creator of Esperanto, was aimed at the relatively uneducated. This textbook, called *Di veltshprakh* (the world language) is remarkable, since it aims to enable self-learning, even for people who have not attended school. After Esperanto, Naymanovich went on to write other language manuals, all designed to enable numerous people with a limited amount of education to break out of their cultural and linguistic isolation. *Di veltshprakh* can therefore be seen as a prototype that the author would reproduce for the self-learning of German, Russian, Polish and Biblical Hebrew.

KEYWORDS: ESPERANTO — TEXTBOOKS — YIDDISH — HASKALA — SELF-LEARNING

preliminary note

The text commented upon in this paper was published decades before Yiddish became standardized. The author uses predominantly an orthography close to German, that was already considered obsolete at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was our choice not to "correct" it and to stick to the text as published in 1888. All quotes using the Hebrew alphabet are faithful to the original. On the other hand, to make reading easier, the transliteration is as much as possible based on YIVO standards. All translations and transliterations are by the author of this article.

1. Introduction

In 1887, four versions of a brochure — in Russian, Polish, French, and German — were published in Warsaw, Congress Poland, the part of Poland that was then under Russian imperial rule.¹ An anonymous author presented the principles of a new "universal" language, destined to become a neutral vector of communication for all mankind. The anonymity was soon lifted: the author of the proposal was a local ophthalmologist, Dr. Lazar "Ludwik" Zamenhof. And the proposed language, while not becoming the universal standard dreamed of by its creator, would nevertheless have a long career, as it is still alive in the first part of the twenty-first century: it is Esperanto.

In the very first years of Esperanto's existence, it was crucial to make the project and the principles of the language known to a wide public as quickly as possible. To reach the most diverse communities, the first activists, including Zamenhof, wrote brochures presenting Esperanto in a large number of languages.

These brochures were intended both to explain the benefits of the project and to provide speakers of each language with the tools for learning the basics of Esperanto. At the same time, small dictionaries were produced to help people acquire a basic lexicon in the language. In fact, in a very short space of time (1887-1892), brochures and dictionaries in seventeen different languages were published. To our knowledge there has never been a comparative study of this series of remarkable documents. Most accounts of the birth of Esperanto focus on the content of the initial booklets published by Zamenhof himself in 1887, and then merely point out that numerous other booklets in other languages were subsequently published.²

However, these various booklets, authored by seventeen different persons, deserve our attention. They present substantial differences, even if they were largely inspired by Zamenhof's four initial texts, the four versions of the *First book*, the *Unua Libro* as Esperantists call it. One of them is highly distinctive. It is *Di veltshprakh*, a text published in Yiddish in October 1888 by the Warsaw journalist Naftali Naymanovich.³ This Yiddish text is the first Esperanto pamphlet to be published in a "minority language"⁴, which does not have the status of a *Kultursprache*, the

1. Zamenhof, *Myezhdunarodny iazyk* (1887); Zamenhof *Język międzynarodowy* (1887); Zamenhof, *La langue internationale* (1887); Zamenhof, *Internationale Sprache* (1887).

2. See Boulton (1960), *Zamenhof, creator of Esperanto*; Korzhenkov (2011), *Homarano*; Korzhenkov (2010), *Zamenhof: The Life, Works and Ideas*; Künzli (2010), *L.L. Zamenhof*; and Schor (2016), *Bridge of words*.

3. A few months earlier (June 1888), Naymanovich had already released a translation of Zamenhof's book into Hebrew.

4. I use the definition of a "minority language" or *langue minorée* as proposed by Ursula Baumgardt (2021), "Langue minorée".

language of a dominant culture. Another specificity of this text is worthy of note: the author chose to address a specific group, the poorly educated Ashkenazi masses, those "simple people" who had limited access to the major languages and had a low level of education. Naymanovich wanted to convince this culturally underprivileged public to adopt Esperanto, an accessible language that would soon enable them to communicate with the whole world. This was the first Esperanto brochure of the time to make this targeted choice.

Naftali Naymanovich was a well-known journalist and author in the Jewish press in Poland. Probably because he is best known as a writer and journalist for the Yiddish and Hebrew press — he also published in Polish. In fact, Naymanovich's Esperantist activity lies in a double shadow zone: that of Jewish literary studies, where his Esperantist activity is necessarily marginal, and that of the history of Esperanto, in which he was a very peripheral player in the early years of the movement. In scholarly literature, only Agnieszka Jagodzińska comments on his contribution to the diffusion of Esperanto, and briefly compares his two Esperanto textbooks, *Safah achath lekulanu* (Hebrew) and *Di veltspraakh* (Yiddish), respectively.⁵

However, *Di veltspraakh* deserves a genuine spotlight. This brochure sheds significant light on Esperanto propaganda methods and Naymanovich's specific work aimed at the Jewish people. Finally, we shall try to place Naymanovich's Esperantist commitment in the wider context of his considerable work as an educator, as he wrote a large number of manuals for learning various languages, all aimed at the Yiddish-speaking public.

2. Esperanto: a universalist project born in the Borderlands of the Russian Empire

2.1. The search for an universal language: a topical issue of the time

When Lazar Ludwik Zamenhof, at the age of twenty-seven, published the description of a new international language, his idea didn't come out of nowhere. The question of a universal language had been agitating intellectual circles in Europe and the Americas for years. From the beginning of the 1880s, the German Catholic priest Schleyer had enjoyed great success with his constructed language called Volapük, attracting thousands of followers.⁶ The question of adopting a neutral *lingua franca* to escape the competition between the most important imperial (and European) languages - all of which aspired then to the status of dominant language - was therefore a matter of public debate. In October 1887, the year Esperanto appeared on the scene, the prestigious *American Philosophical Society* of Philadelphia appointed a committee to "consider the desirability

5. See Jagodzińska (2012), "Doktor Esperanto," 124–125.

6. Hauptenthal (2013), *Über die Startbedingungen*.

of a universal language" and to "examine *into* [sic] the scientific value of Volapük". In its report, presented in January 1888, the committee criticized several aspects of Volapük, comparing it with two other recent constructed languages: Pasingua and Esperanto. In the end, the Society adopted a resolution which recommended organizing an International Congress for "perfecting a language for learned and commercial purposes".⁷

2.2. *Smoothing interethnic relations in the Borderlands*

Zamenhof's concern was also rooted in his experience as an Eastern European Jew, born into an educated family in Białystok (Grodno governorate), in those Empire Borderlands where multiple ethnic groups coexisted, in the western part of the Pale of Settlement.⁸ He therefore spent his childhood in a multi-ethnic, multilingual city, where the most important nationalities were Jews (62% of the population in 1897), Poles (17.2%), Russians (10.3%).⁹ In its streets, Yiddish, Polish, Russian, German and Belarussian were spoken, in addition to the specific liturgical languages used in places of worship (Old Slavonic, Latin, Hebrew). This experience clearly motivated him to design a neutral communication tool between individuals and peoples, enabling them to escape from relationships of linguistic domination. As early as his founding text of 1887, Zamenhof alluded to this situation, and to the usefulness of a neutral language to temper hostility that frequently arose between different "nations" sharing the same place of living: "Any person who has had the fortune to reside in a town in which he meets citizens of nations often hostile to each other, can easily understand and appreciate the enormous service that could be rendered by an International Language."¹⁰

He would return to this seminal personal experience several times, both in his correspondence and in interviews.¹¹ In 1896, he already clearly described the coexistence of different national languages in the same city as a source of constant conflict: "In such a city, more than anywhere else, a sensitive nature feels the heavy misfortune that is linguistic diversity and convinces itself at every step that the plurality of languages is the only, or at least the main cause of the division of the human family, separating it into enemy parts."¹²

7. *Nature* (1888), "The Scientific Value of Volapük". The Congress never actually took place.

8. Korzhenkov (2011), *Homarano*; Korzhenkov (2010), *Zamenhof: The Life, Works and Ideas*; O'Keeffe 2019), "An International Language".

9. *First general census*.

10. From the translation by Phillips (1889), *An Attempt toward an International Language*, 6–7. Russian original: "Кто разъ попробоваль жить въ городѣ, населенномъ людьми различныхъ, борящихся между собою, націй, тотъ посувствоваль безъ сомнѣнія, какую громадную услугу оказалъ бы челоувѣчеству интернаціональный языкъ..." Zamenhof (1887), *Mezhdunarodnyi iazyk*, 4–5.

11. Zamenhof (1896), "Eltiro el privata letero;" Zamenhof (1905 — published in 2011), "Letero de L.L. Zamenhof al Alfred Michaux"; Zamenhof (1907), "Esperanto and Jewish Ideals."

12. Esperanto original : "en tia urbo pli ol ie la impresema naturo sentas la multepezan malfeliĉon de

2.3. *The absent context: authoritarianism and anti-Semitism*

Zamenhof's early Esperantist writings are completely apolitical. In these texts, he describes a universal philanthropic project, rooted in concern for the good of mankind in general. Yet the social and political context in which he developed Esperanto was particularly bleak. In the Russian Empire, the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 had led to a worsening of the social and political climate. Censorship and the surveillance of opponents, particularly coming from national movements, were stepped up. Jewish communities in the southwest of the Empire were victims of a colossal wave of pogroms in 1881-1882, which also affected major cities such as Warsaw and Kyiv.¹³ While the civil rights of Jews, recognized since 1862 in Congress Poland, were maintained there,¹⁴ in the rest of the Empire their situation worsened, e.g. with the adoption of the discriminatory May Laws in 1882.¹⁵ The fate of Jewish conscripts was made harsher under Vannovsky, war minister from 1881.¹⁶

What's more, outside the borders of the Russian Empire, political anti-Semitism spread throughout Europe, a turning point being the creation of the Anti-Semitic League in Germany in 1879.¹⁷ It was not until almost twenty years later that Zamenhof spoke out about his condition as a Jew in Eastern Europe, explicitly linking his Jewishness to his universalist project. In a letter to the French Esperantist Alfred Michaux, he states: "If I hadn't been a Jew from the Ghetto, the idea of unifying mankind would never have occurred to me."¹⁸

This long silence on the context of the project's emergence is probably due to two distinct factors. Firstly, to defend the idea of a universal language, it was more important to emphasize its potential benefits for all mankind than to focus on local factors or a specific target population. Secondly, Zamenhof, who wanted to spread his idea widely, was a subject of the Russian Empire. All his publishing activities had to pass the hurdle of imperial censorship. Books, pamphlets and newspapers had to obtain the censor's authorization before being published. It was therefore

diverslingveco kaj konvinkiĝas ĉe ĉiu paŝo, ke la diverseco de lingvoj estas la sola, aŭ almenaŭ la ĉefa kaŭzo, kiu disigas la homan familion kaj dividas ĝin en malamikaj partoj." Zamenhof (1896), "Eltiro el privata letero", 115.

13. Antony Polonsky (2010) mentions over 200 pogroms in *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. II, 5.

14. In addition to full civil rights, they were not subject to military service. On the specific situation of the Jews in Congress Poland, see Polonsky (2010), *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. I, 274 and 315.

15. Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. I; Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. II.

16. "The military required a disproportionately large number of Jewish recruits". Petrovsky-Shtern, "Military Service in Russia".

17. Dubnow (1973), *History of the Jews*.

18. Zamenhof, "Letero de L.L. Zamenhof al Alfred Michaux". Full text published in Korzhenkov, *Homarano*, 9–17. Esperanto original: "*se mi ne estus hebreo el la ghetto, la ideo pri la unuigo de la homaro aŭ tute ne venus al mi en la kapon*".

essential, at the very beginning, to describe a harmless philanthropic project, without alluding to the political and social context which, in the Tsarist Empire, made it particularly relevant.

2.4. The local and the universal

To sum up, at the end of the 1880s, the Esperanto proposal was set in a dual context: on the one hand, that of a bourgeois European universalism, in tune with the acceleration of exchanges linked to the "First Globalization" of pre-1914. As goods and ideas circulated ever more rapidly, the improvement of communication in general became an issue,¹⁹ and the question of a universal language was therefore a topical one. It was also a time when none of the imperial languages that had emerged from Europe could boast genuine supremacy, whether for trade, science and technology, diplomacy.

On the other hand, however, the Esperanto project was strongly rooted in the specific political and social conditions of Eastern Europe. This was a time when the dominated peoples of the big Empires, and in particular the Jews, were facing a series of challenges in asserting their cultural, religious, linguistic and economic rights. Neutralizing relations of linguistic domination by adopting a "neutral" international language is therefore a proposal that made particular sense in this Europe of the Borderlands, for all dominated peoples.

However, given their specific situation, there was something particularly at stake in "bringing" the Jewish people the promise of a way out of the ghetto and proposing that they adopt Esperanto.²⁰ And even though Zamenhof did not express himself on the centrality of Esperanto's promise of emancipation for oppressed Jews until late in the game, twenty years later, it appears that, from the very first years of the movement, a discreet but important effort was made to bring the benefits of the new language to uneducated Yiddish speakers. A Zamenhof acquaintance, Naftali Naymanovich, deserves special credit for this effort. From 1888 onwards, he tried to spread the *lingvo internacia* among the Jewish communities least integrated into the "modern" society of the time, by writing the first Esperanto textbook in Yiddish.

19. Berger (2003), *Notre première globalisation*.

20. Brigid O'Keeffe (2019) considers early Esperanto to be "An International Language for Russia's Jews (and the World)." "An International Language," 6.

3. Di veltshprakh: a part of a multilingual jigsaw puzzle

3.1. *The seventeen languages of the early diffusion*

Naymanovich's contribution is one of the first printed works of the Esperanto movement. It was published in 1888, just one year after Zamenhof's first pamphlet. It must be placed in a series of manifestos and textbooks that were quickly published in many languages to propagate the new idea, either on the initiative of the language's founder, or completely independently of him. Since the success of the Esperanto enterprise could only be based on free adherence, as no state was going to take up the project and include the learning of the new "international language" as part of its political and educational agenda, it was therefore necessary to multiply propaganda materials to convince a large international audience.

In fact, Zamenhof lacked the financial and organisational resources to create a sufficient number of such textbooks, which were of crucial importance. Thus, the success of the enterprise depended merely on the energy invested by volunteers that would create such documents for different linguistic audiences. Zamenhof had anticipated the problem. In the *First Book*, he already mentioned that "the international language being, like any national language, a collective property, the author forever renounces all personal rights."²¹

This meant that anyone interested could take the contents of the *First Book*,²² translate them or adapt them to their own guide. This liberal attitude enabled the Esperantists to multiply learning materials in a very short space of time. As shown in Table 1, in 1892, six years after the first brochure, activists had already created short textbooks and/or mini-dictionaries in seventeen different languages.²³

21. Russian original: "Интернациональный языкъ, подобно всякому національному, составляет достояніе общественное, и отъ всякихъ личныхъ правъ на него авторъ на всегда отказывается." Zamenhof, *Mezhdunarodnyi iazyk*, 2.

22. This short brochure (around forty pages in its very first version) was designed both to convince readers of the usefulness of *lingvo internacia* and to help them grasp the basics of Esperanto. It includes a general argument in favor of the language, a brief description of grammar, a small dictionary (approx. 920 words), a brief anthology of Esperanto texts and reply coupons for corresponding with the author. Korzhenkov, *Zamenhof: The Life*, 16 ; Korzhenkov, *Homarano*, 88.

23. That list does not include all Esperantist publications of the time. It only encompasses the short manifestos/textbooks and small dictionaries, i.e. the documents that replicate wholly or partially the contents of the *First Book*, and were designed to enable the reader to start learning the language.

Table 1 – Brochures and mini-dictionaries of the early Esperanto movement (1887–1892)

Year	Languages	Remarks
1887	Russian - Polish - French - German	the four originals of L.L. Zamenhof
1888	English (by Steinhaus) - Hebrew - Yiddish Second German textbook (by Einstein)	both Hebrew and Yiddish textbooks authored by Naftali Naymanovich
1889	English (by Geoghegan) - English (by Phillips) Swedish - Latvian Romanian (mini-dictionary only) Spanish (mini-dictionary only, by E. von Wahl)	Esperanto-Romanian dictionary: first and only early Esperantist publication written by a female author, Marietta Frolo
1890	Czech - Danish - Italian - Lithuanian - Spanish - Bulgarian	first textbook in Spanish by José Rodríguez Huertas
1891	-	-
1892	Portuguese	-

Sources: various catalogues of public libraries

According to this table, one can see that apart from Hebrew, which is a special case (being then both a scholarly and a liturgical language), all other languages used were European, six of them being at that time languages of colonial states or continental empires, having therefore a wide geographical spread (Russian, French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, German). In a world then dominated by Europe and its former colonies in the Americas, the first activists could consider that they had succeeded in giving their enterprise a truly global audience.

3.2. Where does Di veltshprakh fit into this scheme?

Authorized by the imperial censorship in September 1888, *Di veltshprakh* was one of four pamphlets printed in 1888. These four 1888 documents were the first *not* written directly by Zamenhof.²⁴ *Di veltshprakh* has a very special status in this ensemble: while the other six languages of publication in the pioneering period of 1887-1888 are languages of high cultural prestige, and mostly administrative languages of powerful states,²⁵ the Yiddish pamphlet is the first work of Esperanto propaganda to be published in a vernacular (and widely despised at the time) minority language.

24. More about the four 1888 publications: only Steinhaus' English brochure (1888) and Naymanovich's textbook in Hebrew are full translations of Zamenhof's work, albeit there are some slight differences between those books and the original texts of 1887. The Yiddish and German textbooks differ substantially from Zamenhof's texts.

25. Three languages are represented several times in this list (English, German, Spanish): this testifies to the spontaneous, non-centralized nature of the initiatives to spread Zamenhof's ideas.

This fact alone gives this publication a great singularity. Yet, in the commonly told accounts of Esperanto's birth and spread, the existence of this Yiddish adaptation of the *First Book* is only mentioned in passing, and never commented on.²⁶ Among the scholars who have specifically focused on the Jewish dimension of the "international language" project,²⁷ only Jagodzińska (2012), mentions Najmanovich and comments briefly on his translation work into Yiddish and Hebrew.²⁸

In fact, in all the literature we have consulted, the only textbooks whose contents are analyzed and commented on *in detail* are Zamenhof's four originals, the "real" First Books. As far as we know, none of the derived texts has been studied separately in an academic publication, or systematically compared with this 1887 "matrix". Neither has *Di veltshprakh*.

4. Why write a brochure in the Jargon of Ashkenazi Jews?

4.1. A project initially conceived for the educated

In the first Esperanto brochures, it is clear that the target audience the author is addressing is an educated public. The texts of 1887 are explicit: Dr. Esperanto is appealing to the segment of the population he considers most likely to be interested in the international language project. The terms he uses to describe the target audience are very similar from one brochure to the next: "при перепискѣ съ средне-образованнымъ европейцемъ,"²⁹ "un Européen possédant une instruction moyenne,"³⁰ "einen mittelmässig gebildeten Menschen,"³¹ or "an [sic] European of middle education".³² The decision to publish a pamphlet in Hebrew (June 4, 1888) was thus in concert with this perspective.

If Naymanovich had remained faithful to Zamenhof's orientation, seeking simply to make the Esperantist proposition as audible as possible to the educated Jewish public, he could have stopped at the publication of *Safah achath lekulanu*,³³ his Hebrew translation of the *Unua Libro*. At that very moment, in the late spring of 1888, this cultivated readership could already take note of the Esperanto proposal in Russian, French, Polish, German and Hebrew, the main *Kultursprachen* easily accessible to Central and Eastern European Jews.

26. See Boulton, *Zamenhof*; Ito (1987) "*La unua unua unua libro*;" Künzli, L. L. *Zamenhof*; Korzhenkov, *Zamenhof, The Life*; Korzhenkov, *Homarano*.

27. See Schor, *Bridge of words*; O'Keeffe, "An International Language;" Rubin and Kahn (2020), *Jewish Languages from A to Z*; Russell, *Did Esperanto Answer the Jewish Question?*

28. Jagodzińska, "Doktor Esperanto", 124–125.

29. Zamenhof, *Mezhdunarodnyi iazyk*, 19.

30. Zamenhof, *La langue internationale*, 21.

31. Zamenhof, *Internationale Sprache*, 12.

32. From the first English translation. Steinhaus (1888), *Dr. Esperanto's International Tongue*, 16.

33. Usual transcription of the title אַחַת לְכָלֵנוּ שֶׁפֶה אֶחָד in Esperantist catalogues from the late 19th century.

4.2. *Promoting the lingvo internacia in Yiddish: a democratic choice?*

Without going back at length into the social landscape of pre-1914 Yiddishland, the existence of popular masses with a low level of education and limited or no access to languages of "higher culture" is a well-documented historical fact.³⁴ Naymanovich decided thus to prepare an Esperanto pamphlet in Yiddish, specifically to reach this poorly educated Jewish public, whom he wanted to address in his own familiar language. As Jagodzińska puts it, "the Hebrew edition was intended for the elite, while the 'Jargon' edition was for simple people".³⁵

This point is made abundantly clear in Naymanovich's text. As early as page 6 of *Di veltshprakh*, he distinguishes three categories of reader: the "educated person" (*gebildeter mentsh*), the "moderately educated person, who knows at least one European language" (*mesik gebildeter mentsh, vos bezitst nor eyn eyropeyshe shprakh*),³⁶ and finally "someone quite simple" (*eyn eynfakher mentsh*). And he makes a special effort (see section 6 below) to be understood and heard by the last category, the "quite simple" who are his main target. Fundamentally, the preparation of *Di veltshprakh* is part of a desire to reach the (Jewish) population in its entirety. It is therefore a concern that could be described as democratic. It is the first concrete expression of the Esperanto project's claim to universalism. To a certain extent, Naymanovich takes the Esperantists at their word. If you want to propose a truly universal language, then you have to give yourself the means to speak to all categories of the population, the most educated as well as the simplest people.

This approach is in fact part of a long history of the circulation of ideas in the East European Jewish world. From the very beginnings of the *Haskala*, *maskilic* intellectuals knew that Yiddish had to be used to reach and educate the masses, even if Yiddish was considered a low-status *Jargon*. As Marion Aptroot and Roland Gruschka point out: "Whoever wanted to reach the widest possible readership chose Yiddish and not Hebrew. Yiddish was particularly suitable for spreading useful knowledge among the Jewish population".³⁷ The vernacular language should therefore be used as a "mediator of modern culture".³⁸ The publication of an Esperanto brochure in Yiddish in 1888 was a continuation of this pragmatic attitude of enlightened Jewish intellectuals. Yiddish, that "effective international language, especially for the underprivileged social classes,"³⁹ could also help the

34. See Baumgarten (2002), *Le Yiddish*.

35. Polish original: "*edycja hebrajska była przeznaczona dla elit, a „żargonowa” dla ludzi prostych.*" Jagodzińska, "Doktor Esperanto", 124.

36. Naymanovich obviously excludes Yiddish from this category. *Jargon* is not entitled to this status.

37. German original: "*Wer [...] eine möglichst breite Leserschaft erreichen wollte, wählte Jiddisch und nicht Hebräisch [...]. Das Jiddisch bot sich besonders an, um nützliches Wissen in der jüdischen Bevölkerung zu verbreiten.*" Aptroot and Gruschka (2010), *Jiddisch: Geschichte und Kultur*, 97.

38. German original: "*Vermittler moderner Kultur*". Ibid., 108.

39. French original: "*langue internationale efficace, notamment pour les classes sociales défavorisées.*"

Esperanto project to spread across a wide Yiddishland area, leapfrogging political borders.

Naymanovich's remarkable choice was not to remain an exception for long within the Esperanto movement: two early activists, the Latvian Libeks (1889) and the Lithuanian Dąbrauskas (1890), soon followed his example and published pamphlets in their national languages shortly after him, even though the Baltic Lands were culturally dominated by German, Polish, and Russian.

5. A pamphlet written specifically for the Jewish People

5.1. *Just a translation of Zamenhof's First Book ?*

A quick glance at Naymanovich's brochure might lead one to believe that *Di veltshprakh* is a mere translation of the 1887 *Unua Libro*. In fact, the cover states in Russian that this text is a "work written by Dr. Esperanto, translated into the Jewish oral language by Ha-Nets" (Ha-Nets being Naymanovich's usual pen name).⁴⁰ It is true, moreover, that leafing through the document, one notices that it contains the same basic elements as the *First Book*: a plea for Esperanto, a description of the principles of the new language, a small anthology, coupons for corresponding with Dr. Esperanto, plus a mini-dictionary of around 900 terms.

Yet the brochure is substantially different from Zamenhof's original. And this is already visible on the cover. Just below the brochure's title, the following Yiddish text appears: "written by Dr. Esperanto, and adapted for the Jewish people by Ha-Nets".⁴¹ Naymanovich thus announces from the outset that this text is an adaptation and not a simple translation, contrary to what is announced in Russian just below.

Moreover, his book is much longer than the *Unua Libro*. As calculated by us, *Di veltshprakh* is, in volume, 40% longer than the *First Book* in Russian.⁴² This difference clearly indicates that this is not a translation, but an enlarged and necessarily substantially transformed text. *Di veltshprakh* is thus the first booklet in our corpus that can be described as an adaptation, rather than a translation, of the 1887 originals. In the first half of 1888, Steinhaus for the English and Naymanovich himself for the Hebrew had produced translations that remained fairly faithful to the matrix texts of the previous year.⁴³

Piron (1984), "Contribution à l'étude des apports du yidiche," 17.

40. Russian original: "Сочинение Д-ра Эсперанто, переведено на еврейский разговорный языкъ Ганецомъ." *Ha-Nets* means "The Sparrow Hawk" in Hebrew. Czarist censorship required that the title and author's name of any printed item published in the Empire be translated into Russian, regardless of the language in which it was written.

41. Yiddish original: אומגעארבייטעט פיר דעם יודישען פאלק פֿאַן הנץ. Transliteration: *umgearbeyt far dem yidishn folk fun Ha-Nets*.

42. This is based on my own count of the characters using the digital version of the 1887 Russian text, and the result of my retyping the Yiddish version. Even if the structural dissimilarities between both languages are taken into account, the difference between the two versions is significant.

43. For reading the Hebrew pamphlet and comparing it with Zamenhof's originals, my thanks to Itamar

Why, then, was it stated in Russian that *Di veltshprakh* was a translation, and in Yiddish that it was an adaptation? This difference can be interpreted as a trick to get past the imperial censors as quickly as possible: publication authorization for a translation of a pamphlet whose contents had already been approved the previous year was certainly easier to obtain than for a text that the censor might have considered as a new object to be closely examined. This mention in Russian of a "translation" may have also misled most historians of the Esperanto movement, who perhaps concluded too quickly that this Yiddish text did not merit scrutiny, since its contents certainly reflected those of the 1887 leaflets.

5.2. *Speaking to the Jewish people*

Di veltshprakh is thus the first Esperanto text to be written in a non-official, minority language. It is also, and above all, the only one of all the texts from this period to explicitly address an ethno-national group.⁴⁴ Admittedly, Zamenhof's universalist arguments on the usefulness of his international language are still present in the text. But Naymanovich asserts (pages 5, 6, 16) that the Jewish people have a particular interest in the success of Esperanto (see his arguments reproduced *in extenso* with their full translation in Table 2).

He states from the outset that "for us Jews, it would be an opportunity (*metsie*), if such a project were to come to fruition",⁴⁵ and then goes on to develop an extremely pragmatic argument to convince the Jews:

1- Jews are merchants, who will benefit from an international language. They travel for business more than other peoples, and have to keep in touch with merchants far away.⁴⁶

2- As young Jews have to spend a great deal of time learning Hebrew and religious texts, they have too little time to learn the various everyday languages properly. Esperanto is therefore a time- and energy-saving solution to the twin imperatives of learning the holy language and keeping in touch with the contemporary world.⁴⁷

3- Real opportunities are opening up for Jewish writers who earn their living from their pen. For the new language does not yet have books, whether in translation or for original texts, there will soon be a need for many contributors with a fine style. Jewish writers will thus find a source of work and income.⁴⁸

Even Zohar (2019) and Paweł Jabłoński (2023). I echo their conclusions about the similarity of these texts.

44. All other brochures of the period, with the notable exception of the Lithuanian textbook published two years later by Dąbrauskas (1890), are aimed at an unspecified public, making minor cultural adaptations to the target audience.

45. Naymanovich, *Di veltshprakh*, 5.

46. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

47. *Ibid.*, 6.

48. *Ibid.*, 16.

Table 2 – The arguments addressed to the Jewish people

<p style="text-align: right;">general statement (p. 5)</p> <p>פֿאַר אונס יודען וואָללט דאס געוועזען גאר אַ מציאה , וועגן אזוי אַ פלאַן זאלל אויסגעפֿיהרט ווערען , עס זאל קענען זיין איין וועלטשפראַכע.</p> <p><i>far uns yidn volt dos geven a metsie, ven azoy a plan zol oysgefirt vern, es zol kennen zayn ayn veltshprakh.</i></p> <p>For us Jews, it would be an opportunity (<i>metsie</i>), if such a project were to come to fruition, and a world language could exist.</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">argument one (pp. 5-6)</p> <p>ערשטענס, דאריבער ווייל יודען זענען סוחרים , אין ברויכען געשעפֿטסהאלבער צו בעזוכען פֿדעמדע לענדער מעהר אַלס אללע אנדערע פֿעלקער, אדער צו שטעהען אין פֿערבינדונג מיט קויפֿלייטע פֿון גאנץ ווייט .</p> <p><i>ershtens, deriber vayl yidn zenen sokhrim, un broykh gesheftshalber tsu bazukhen fremde lender mer als ale andere felker, oder tsu shteyn in farbindung mit koyflayt fun gants vayt.</i></p> <p>Firstly, because Jews are merchants, who need to travel to foreign countries more than other peoples, or to keep in touch with merchants far away, in order to do business.</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">argument two (p. 6)</p> <p>צווייטענס, ווייל דער פֿראַממער יוד , ברויך זיין קינד צו לאַזען לערנען פֿיעל יודישע געגענשטאַנדע , תנ"ך , ש"ס , פוסקים וכדומה , בלייבט עס זעהר וועניג צייט צו לערנען אנדערע שפראַכען , וועלכעס גרינדליך צו ערלערנען , ברויך אַ קינד צו אָפֿפֿערן דארויף זיין גאנצע יוגענדצייט. ובפרט נישט יעדער יוד איז אים שטאנד , צו לאַזען לערנען זיין קינד אזוי פֿיעל שפראַכען , וועלכעס איז זעהר קאָסטשפיעליג .</p> <p><i>tsveytens, vayl der frumer yid, broykh zayn kind tsu lozn lernen fil yidische gegenshtande, tanakh, shas, poskim, ukhedoyme, blaybt es zeyer veynik tsayt tsu lernen andere shprakhn, velkhe grindlekh tsu erlernen, broykh a kind tsu opfern daroyf zayn gantse yugnt-tsayt. ubifrat nisht yeder yid iz in shtand, tsu lozn lernen zayn kind azoy fil shprakhn, velkhes iz zeyer kostshpilik.</i></p> <p>Secondly, because a pious Jew has to teach his child many Jewish subjects, Tanakh, Talmud, Commentaries, etc., there is very little time left to learn other languages, for the careful learning of which a child must sacrifice his entire childhood. What's more, not every Jew is in a position to have someone teach his child so many languages, which is very expensive.</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">argument three (p. 16)</p> <p>פֿאַר יודישע שרייבער וועלכע לעבען פֿון זייער פֿעדער , האט דיא שפראַכע בעזאָנדערס אַ גרויס וויכטיגקייט. איך וועלל דאס גאנץ קורץ ערקלערען. עס איז בעוואוסט , אז ווער עס בעזיצט אַ סטיל צום שרייבען אין איין לשון , קענן זיך לייכט צואייגנען אויך אַ גוטען סטיל אין איין אנדער לשון , וועגן ער ערלערנט עס גוט . אונד מחמת דיא עספּעראַנטישע שפראַכע , איז ערשט פֿריש , אין זיא פֿאנגט ערשט אן צו געהן אויף דיא וועלט , ברויך זיא דער האבען אלערלייא ווערקע פֿון יעדער וויסענשאַפֿט , פֿון יעדער קענטניס , דעגן זיא פֿערמאגט נאך נישט קיין ביכער . אויך וועלין קירצליך אנפֿאנגען צייטונגען הערויסצוגעהן . צו דעם אללעם בדויך מען האבען שרייבער , אללעס איבערצוזעצען פֿון פֿרעמדע שפראַכען, אויך צו שרייבען אריגינעלע ביכער אינד ארטיקעלן. אין דאס וועט יעדעם שרייבער זעהר לייכט אנקומען, זיך אין דיזעם לשון אַ סטיל אויסצוארבייטען , דעגן ער ברויך נאר אַ גאנץ קורצע צייט דיא שפראַכע צו ערלערנען . אלזא וועלין אויך יודישע שרייבער וואס וועלין זיך אויסצייכנען מיט זייער סטיל , האבען אַ קוועללע צור ארבייט אין צו פֿערדיענען .</p> <p><i>far yidische shrayber velkhe lebn fun zeyer feder; hot di shprakhe bazunders a groys vikhtikeyt. ikh vel dos gants kurts erklern. es iz bavust, as ver es bazitst a stil tsum shraybn in a loshn, ken zikh laykht tsueygnen oykh a gutn stil in an ander loshn, ven er erlernt es gut. un makhmes di esperantishe shprakh iz ersht frish, un zi fangt ersht on tsu geyn af di velt, broykh zi den hobn alerley verter fun yeder visnshaft, fun yede kentsnis, den zi farmogt nor nisht kayn bikher. oykh veln kirtslekh onfangen tsaytungen aroystsugeyn. tsu dem alemen broykh men hobn shrayber; alts ibertsuzetsen fun fremde shprakhn, oykh tsu shraybn originale bikher un artikeln. Un dos vet yedem shrayber zeyer laykht onkumen, zikh in dizem loshn a stil oystsuarbetn, den er broykh nor a gants kurtse tsayt di shprakhe tsu erlernen. Alzo veln oykh yidische shrayber vos veln zikh oystsaykhenen mit zeyer stil, hobn a kvele tsur arbet un zu fardinen.</i></p> <p>For Jewish writers who live by their pen, this language is of great importance. Let me explain this briefly. We know that when someone has a good style in one language, he can also acquire a good style in another, if he learns it well. And as the Esperanto language is very new, just starting to enter the world, it needs to have all kinds of terms from all sciences, all kinds of knowledge, because it doesn't have any books yet. Also, newspapers will soon start to be published. For all this, writers are needed, to translate everything from foreign languages, or to write original books and articles. And it will be very easy for any writer to get by, to forge a style in this language, because it takes very little time to learn it. And so, Jewish writers will distinguish themselves by their style, and will have a source of both work and income.</p>

We do not wish to discuss the relevance of these arguments, but rather to contextualize them. The first argument refers to the most classical image of the Jewish people as merchants. This stereotype was expressed by Naymanovich at a time when, conversely, as a result of the transformations brought about by the industrial revolution, the economic activities carried out by Jewish populations in Eastern Europe were diversifying considerably. The second argument, about the enormous amount of time required of every young Jew to learn the sacred texts, and their consequent estrangement from the languages of the environment, reflects a critical view of the isolation of Eastern European Jewish circles, "confined" not only to Jewish neighbourhoods, but also in their specific languages, the sacred language (Hebrew) and the vernacular language (Yiddish), an isolation that is very precisely staged in the best-known works of Yiddish literature, but which is also present in Naymanovich's early short stories, published in 1867.⁴⁹ Does the third argument, which promises income prospects for Jewish writers with a "good style", reflect the real existence of a large milieu of Ashkenazi writers who were more likely than their non-Jewish counterparts to earn their living from their pen? We have no concrete evidence to support this hypothesis, and simply note that this is exactly the situation Naymanovich had been facing since the early 1860s. Jagodzińska interprets this argument as follows: with Esperanto, Jewish writers would be able to transfer their works into a malleable international language and thus reach a broader audience.⁵⁰ The arguments directed at the Jewish people, while remarkably present, occupy relatively little space: they account for just thirty lines in all, spread across two different sections of the brochure. But they do attest to Naymanovich's vision of the liberating dimension of Esperanto, which can lead Jews out of the ghetto.

6. Teaching the simple folk

6.1. A set of examples adapted to everyday life

Naymanovich uses highly expressive rhetorical devices to appeal to the *yidische gas*.⁵¹ He portrays persons totally resistant to novelty, the better to refute their arguments. He puts the following phrases into their mouths, in a spoken, colloquial style: "Who are we going to convince with this? These are old wives' tales [literally: the kind of things you tell at a grandmother's grave]. I'm not going to be fooled by this, it is idiotic. It smacks of fraud".⁵²

49. They appeared in the *Warschauer Jüdische Zeitung*, the brief-lived weekly magazine in Yiddish (1867-1868) published by Hillel Glatsztern.

50. Jagodzińska, "Doktor Esperanto", 125.

51. The "Jewish street". Commonly used term to designate public opinion in a traditional Jewish community.

52. Naymanovich, *Di veltshprakh*, 6–7. Yiddish original:

וועמען וועט מען דאס איינרעדען? אזאלכע זאכען זאגט מען אויף אַ באַבעס קבד, איך וועל מיר דאס נישט לאזען איינרעדען. דאס

Naymanovich's response to his imaginary opponents recalls the traditional skepticism of the people in the face of innovation. He evokes the various generations who successively doubted the value of the railway, the telegraph, and finally the telephone, concluding: "We too shook our heads, and did not want to believe that, when Barukh stood at a city gate, and Zerakh at a gate on the other side, they could have a long discussion together, as if they were face to face and nose to nose".⁵³

This position of fundamental incredulity in the face of innovation, or even anxiety in the face of novelty, is a *topos* of Yiddish literature, illustrated for example in Fradl Shtok's short story *di ershte ban* (*The First railway*, 1919), in which a *shtetl* is in turmoil over the opening of the railroad line. The characters portrayed by Naymanovich are, in fact, the bearers of ready-made questions to which he hastens to respond appropriately. Here, he is in the classic position of the enlightened *maskilic* intellectual who must combat the *naïveté* and prejudices of the little people, who may be ignorant, but who can be put on the path to modernity - learning Esperanto, of course - by means of rational arguments.

Another way of reaching the public is to give examples from the everyday life of the Yiddish-speaking people. Not surprisingly, the names chosen for the grammatical examples are familiar to him: Abraham, Solomon and Sarah (pp. 38, 46, 56) appear, as do the cities of Lublin and Warsaw (p. 40).⁵⁴ But above all, and most unexpectedly, Naymanovich fabricates model sentences that dramatize the misery and violence of social relations in Yiddishland: "the expellee has had nothing to eat for three days already;"⁵⁵ "beaten by the master he wept and swore that he would take fierce revenge."⁵⁶ This reference to familiar figures of Jewish misery and domestic violence is a far cry from the affected tone of the pamphlets designed by Zamenhof, and lends a very singular touch to the author's work.

איז אַ גענאַרטע זאך. דא שמעקט עפעס אַ שווינדעלע.

Transliteration: "*vemen vet men dos aynredn? azelkhe zakhn zogt men af a bobes keyver, ikh vil dos mir nisht lozn aynredn. dos iz a genarte zakh. do shmekt epes a shvindl.*"

53. Naymanovich, *Di veltsprakh*, 7. Yiddish original:

פונקט אזוי האבען מיר אליין ערשט נישט לאנג געשוויקעלט מיט דען קאפ, און מיר האבען נישט געוואלט גלויבען, אז אָן דער זייט ראָגאַטקע וועט שטיין ברוך, אין אן דער אנדרע זייט ראָגאַטקע קייגען איבער וועט שטעהן זרח, אין זיין ביידע וועללין זיך קענן צוזאַמען אויסשמיען אללעס, גלייך זיין וואלטען געשטאַנען פנים צו פנים אין נאָז צו נאָז.

Transliteration: "*punkt azoy hobn mir aleyn ersht nisht lang geshoykelt mitn kop, un mir hobn nisht gevolt gloybn, az an der zayt rogatke vet shteyn borekh, un an der ander zayt rogatke kegn iber vet shteyn zerekh, un zey bayde veln zikh kenen tsuzamen oysshmuesn alts, glaykh zey voltn geshtanen ponem tsu ponem un noz tsu noz.*"

54. The other Esperantist textbooks of the period similarly adapt their examples to their target audience.

55. Naymanovich, *Di veltsprakh*, 38. Esperanto original: *la elpelito malsatas jam la trian tagon*

Yiddish original:

דער ארויסגעטריבענער הונגערט שוין דעם דריטטען טאג.

Transliteration: *der aroysgetribener hungert shoyn dem drith tog.*

56. Naymanovich, *Di veltsprakh*, 38. Esperanto original: *batate de la mastro li ploris kaj ĵuris ke li terure venĝos.* Yiddish original:

געשלאָגענווערענדיג פֿון הערר, וויינטע ער, אונד האט געשווארען אז ער ווירד זיך שרעקליך נוקם זיין.

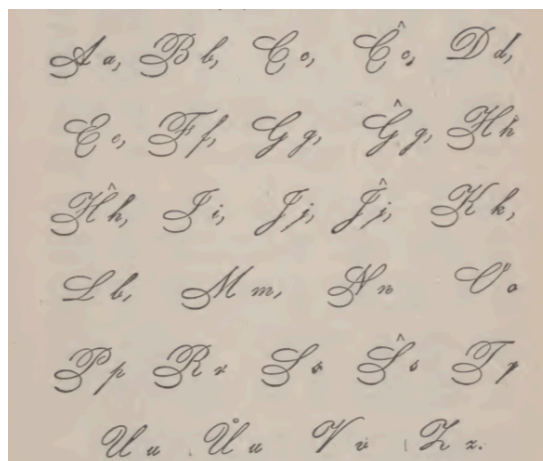
6.2. Explaining the basics to the poorly educated

Naymanovich not only uses a lively, colloquial style, close to everyday life, to convince his audience. He also adapts to his readership's low level of education. And he makes this perfectly clear. He states in a lengthy footnote that, unlike Zamenhof, he is addressing a deprived audience and that he therefore needs to do specific work to be understood: "Dr. Esperanto wrote his original work for people who have a notion of what grammar is, and consequently he explained the whole thing very briefly. But since I know that most Jews don't know what grammar is (be it European or Hebrew), I've had to go into detail about everything, so that every Jew can understand it."⁵⁷

It is yet another justification for the indispensable work of adapting the *First Book* "for the Jewish people", the adaptation announced right on the cover of *Di veltshprakh*. Not only a "cultural" adaptation, but also a transformation of the text to take account of the low level of education which, for Naymanovich, characterizes his fellow Jews. Everyone understands then easily why his pamphlet is so much longer than the previous brochures.

There are three examples of this: firstly, as his readership doesn't necessarily know how to write in the Latin alphabet, Naymanovich presents simple tools for learning to read and write Esperanto (p. 17, p. 19). Figure 1 shows the template proposed to practice writing.

Figure 1 – A template for learning to write Esperanto cursive



Di veltshprakh, p. 19. Austrian National Library, Department of Planned Languages

Transliteration: *geshlogenverendik fun her, vaynt er, un hot geshvorn az er vert zikh shreklehk noykm zayn.*

57. Naymanovich, *Di veltshprakh*, 27. Yiddish original:

דער ד"ר עספעראנטא האט זיין אריגינאל ווערק געשריבען פאר מענשען וועלכע האבען עפיס א בעגריפ פון א גראממאטיק, דאריבער האט ער דאס גאנץ קורץ געמאכט. איך ווייס אבער אז דער גרעסטער טהייל יודען, ווייסען גאר נישט וואס דאס איז גראממאטיק אדער דקדוק, בין איך גענייט געוועזען זעהר פיעל איבער איין זאך צו רעדען, כדי יעדער יוד זאל דאס קענין פערשטעהען.

Transliteration: *der doktor esperanto hot zayn original verk geshribn far mentshn velkhe hobn epes a bagrif fun a gramatik, deriber hot er dos gants kurts gemakht. ikh veys ober az der grester teyl yidn, vaysn gor nisht vos dos iz gramatik oder dikdek, bin ikh geneyt geven zeyer fil iber eyn zakh tsu redn, kedey yeder yid zol dos kenen farshteyn.*

Secondly, Naymanovich begins the grammar section of his textbook with a lengthy explanation of what a sentence is, its constituent elements (subject, verb, etc.), breaking down in 14 lines a very simple example: *der foter is aheym gekumen*, "the father has arrived home".⁵⁸ Another striking illustration of his willingness to explain in detail is his presentation of the masculine and feminine genders, which in Esperanto serve only to differentiate between gendered beings (male and female humans or animals).⁵⁹ To feminize a term, the suffix *-in* is added to the generic noun (as in German: "*der Kunde*", the customer, "*die Kundin*", the female customer). Thus, the word *cousin*, "*kuzo*", is feminized to "*kuzino*". How is this rule explained in previous pamphlets? In the 1887 German brochure, which lends itself well to comparison, the explanation is very short. The rule is stated in one sentence: "the suffix 'in' describes the female gender".⁶⁰ This is followed by two examples (brother-sister: *frato-fratino*, father-mother: *patro-patrino*) and a few brief additional remarks. The whole explanation takes up 7 lines and 45 words.⁶¹ In Yiddish, on the other hand, this question is dealt with in 21 lines and 235 words, a volume of text five times greater.⁶² Naymanovich justifies the derivation of the feminine gender on the basis of the biblical text: "just as our mother Eve was made from [...] the first man, so every feminine can be made from the masculine".⁶³ This is a transparent allusion to the process of forming the word *woman* "isha" from the word *man* "ish" in the Tanakh:

לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה, כִּי מֵאִישׁ לְקַחָהּ-זֹאת
(Genesis: 2,23)

In the classical American translation of the early 20th century: "She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man".⁶⁴

Regardless of Naymanovich's critical opinion of his readership's low level of education, there are two remarks: first, the Jewish common people, uneducated as they were, had nevertheless a minimum of religious instruction, which included learning the Hebrew alphabet; poorly educated, yes, certainly, but illiterate, certainly not. This is true of both boys and girls: the latter, even if they

58. Ibid, 27. Yiddish original : דער פֿאטער איז אהיים געקוממען

59. Nouns that do not refer to a gendered being have a unique gender in Esperanto. *dos bukh*, "the book", neuter in Yiddish: "la libro"; *di levone*, "the moon", feminine in Yiddish: "la luno"; *der telefon*, "the phone", masculine in Yiddish: "la telefono".

60. Zamenhof, *Internationale Sprache*, 11. German original: "*das Suffix -in bezeichnet das weibliche Geschlecht*".

61. Ibid., 11.

62. Naymanovich, *Di veltshprakh*, 10.

63. Ibid, 10. Yiddish original:

דענן אזוי וויא אונזער מוטטער הָיָה איז געמאכט געווארען פֿין מענליכען געשלעכט , פֿין איהר מאנן אדם הראשון , אזוי קען יעדעס לשון נקבה געמאכט ווערין פֿין לשון זכר .

Transliteration: *den azoy vi undzer muter khave iz gemakht gevorn fun menlekhn geshlekht, fun ir man odem harishon, azoy ken yedes loshn nekeyve gemakht vern fun loshn zokher.*

64. Margolis, ed., *The Holy Scriptures*, 3.

had much less access to religious instruction in Hebrew, learned the alphabet by attending the *cheder*, and could therefore read and write, at least in Yiddish. And this makes a big difference compared with the non-Jewish populations of the Ashkenazi environment, where, in the Borderlands of the Russian Empire, illiterate rural dwellers were very numerous. Secondly, Naymanovich in fact contradicts himself a little. He uses grammatical knowledge acquired at *cheder* without saying too much about it. For example, he explains the Esperanto system of modes and tenses (active or passive, present, past and future), and indicates in brackets the corresponding grammatical term from Hebrew grammar (*dikdek*).⁶⁵

6.3. Mobilizing neighboring languages

To facilitate learning, Naymanovich multiplies the references that make sense in the linguistic environment of Ashkenazi Jews. He tries to increase the chances that readers will grasp this or that aspect of the new language. In this, he acts as a pragmatic pedagogue. Figure 2 shows three cases of simultaneous mobilization of different languages: as early as page 9, when Naymanovich discusses the formation of antonyms - a specificity of Esperanto - using the good/bad pair (*bona/malbona*) as an example, he completes his explanation with references to three languages from the immediate vicinity of his readers. The adjective *malbona* is given in Yiddish, of course: נישט גוט (*nisht gut*: not good), but the Yiddish is supplemented by German *nicht gut*, Polish *nie dobrze*, and finally Russian *не хорошо* (*ne khorosho*).

This approach is repeated several times in the Esperanto-Yiddish dictionary.⁶⁶ The preverb *ek -*, which signals the initiation of an action, is explained with reference to Slavic verbs, where this type of formation (preverb *za-*) is common (p. 47): the example "to start singing" or *ekkanti* thus is referred to the Russian verb *занемь* (*zamet'*) and Polish *zaśpiewać*.⁶⁷

Sometimes Hebrew and Slavic languages are summoned at the same time, for example to clarify the translation of "to take", *preni*. The translation is given in Yiddish (נעמען / *nemen*), then supplemented with the Hebrew לקוח, and finally the Russian infinitive *взять* (p. 59).⁶⁸

65. Naymanovich, *Di veltshprakh*, 36–37.

66. Ibid. 43–64

67. Ibid., 47.

68. Ibid., 59. Note the use of the form לקוח, which is an "infinitive absolute" in Biblical Hebrew. The fourteen Hebrew infinitives mentioned in Naymanovich's dictionary are presented in this grammatical form.

Figure 2 – three cases of multilingual contextualisation

a. the antonyms *bona/malbona* (good/bad) Yiddish, Russian, Polish

איז דער תירוץ דארויף, אז אויף דעם מיטטעלשטאנד, נישט גוט' בענימצט
 מען דעך אין אללע שפראכען אויך צווייא ווערטער, צב"ש: nicht gut,
 וועט דא אויך זיין צווייא ווערטער צו nie dobre, не хорошо'

b. *ekkanti* (to start singing) , Yiddish, Russian, Polish

אנפֿאנגען צו זינגען, אדער א זונג מהוען). אזוי וויא אין
 רוסישען, запѣть, וויא אין פאל-נישען (שרייע) kri; zaśpiewać'

c. the verb "to take": one line, four languages (Russian, Hebrew, Yiddish, Esperanto)

(взять, לקוח, נעמען, pren)

Di veltshprakh. Austrian National Library, Department of Planned Languages

Naymanovich's pedagogical concern thus takes him beyond the strictly Jewish and Hebrew universe. His concern is to situate the new language in relation to the entire linguistic context of Ashkenazi Jews. He uses his readership's embeddedness in a multilingual environment to promote understanding, seeking to saturate his text with meaningful references. His willingness to mobilize both the internal diglossia (Yiddish/Hebrew-Aramaic) and the external diglossia (here Russian-Polish-German) of the Ashkenazi world is remarkable.⁶⁹

6.4. The frequent use of *daytshmerish*

One of the most original aspects of Najmanovich's contribution to Esperanto propaganda is his effort to adapt to his readers, their environment and their low level of education. He uses mostly a lively and popular Yiddish.⁷⁰

Yet this meticulous pedagogical work is compromised by the frequent use of terms borrowed from German: the so-called *daytshmerizmen*. Grammatical forms specific to *Hochdeutsch* are present, such as the German polite form *Haben Sie* (a "you", in opposition to "thou", expressed in the 3rd person plural),⁷¹ which does not exist in spoken Yiddish, or the German masculine accusative *den* (דען) where Yiddish says *dem* (דעם). It seems that Naymanovich could not detach himself totally from the posture characteristic of *maskilim* when they resorted to Yiddish: the use of *jargon* by these intellectuals remained the means for "bringing back" the little people to the

69. Aptroot and Gruschka, *Jiddische Geschichte und Kultur*; 13–14.

70. I thank Yitskhok Niborski for his stylistic assessment of the text.

71. Naymanovich, *Di veltshprakh*, 11.

languages of dominant culture, despite the importance and quality of Naymanovich's pedagogical work aimed at the less educated strata.

7. Naftali Najmanovich, author, Esperantist, and teacher

7.1. *Writer and journalist*

Naftali Herts Naymanovich (1843-1898), whose personality and career we've only briefly touched on so far, is neither a celebrity nor an unknown figure in Jewish literature or the press.⁷² Born in the Lublin region (Jozefów), he spent most of his adult life in Lublin, and moved to Warsaw in his forties.⁷³ He already had a solid literary and journalistic career behind him when, at the age of 45, he translated and added to Zamenhof's text *Di veltshprakh*. Mostly known by the pen name *Ha-Nets* or הַנֶּץ (formed from his surname), this polyglot intellectual was literate in Yiddish, Polish, Russian, Hebrew, and German.

His name appears early, during his lifetime, in *Sefer Zikaron* (1889), the very first encyclopaedia of Jewish writers edited (in Hebrew) by Nahum Sokolow, with a short mention of his role as a translator of Zamenhof's *First Book* in Hebrew and Yiddish.⁷⁴

Later on, whether in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, or English, we have found several dictionary entries on Naymanovich and his career. The following list is most probably not exhaustive, but it does attest to the writer's notoriety in various intellectual circles.

- A short notice was published in English in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1905).⁷⁵
- The 1911 *Brockhaus and Efron Jewish Encyclopedia* devoted a more substantial entry to him (in Russian).⁷⁶
- at an unknown date, Nahum Sokolow, in *Ishim*, his dictionary of Hebrew writers, wrote a lengthy entry on Najmanovich.⁷⁷
- In 1927, Reyzen's literary dictionary (in Yiddish) also gave him a substantial place.⁷⁸
- In 1965, still in Yiddish, a notice in the *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Yiddish Literature* adapted and completed Reyzen's entry.⁷⁹

72. Like all Ashkenazi names of the period, it is subject to infinite spelling variations. Standard Yiddish spelling: נַפְתָּלִי-הַעֶרֶץ, נַיִמָּאַנְצוֹוויץ. Modern Hebrew (catalogue of the National Library of Israel) נִפְתָּלִי נַיִמָּאַנְצוֹוויץ. הֵירֶץ יְהוּדָה. Polish : Naftali Hirsza Najmanowicz (See Fuks, 1979, *Prasa żydowska*). Russian : Нафтали Герц Нейманович (See *Evrejskaya Encyclopedia*). English : Naphtali Herz Neumanowitz (See *The Jewish Encyclopedia*).

73. See Sokolow, *Sefer zikaron le-sofre Yiśra'el*. He arrived in Warsaw in 1886.

74. *Ibid.*, column 75.

75. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. IX, 238.

76. *Evrejskaya Encyclopedia*, vol. XI, 655–656.

77. Sokolow, *Ishim*, pp. 214–223.

78. Reyzen (1927), *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur*, vol. 2, 555–556.

79. *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur* (1965), vol. 6, 229–230.

- In 1967, Kressel, in his *Cyclopedia of Modern Hebrew Literature* (in Hebrew), dedicated a (brief) entry to Najmanovich, with Sokolow (1958) as its only source.⁸⁰
- A later work on the history of the Jewish press in Warsaw also made several references to Naymanovich (Fuks 1979, in Polish).⁸¹

His journalistic and writing activities are well documented in these different sources. As a journalist, bookseller, author of articles in Hebrew and Polish, and of Yiddish fiction (including at least one play), he was a very active person. In Warsaw, Nahum Sokolow published several of his contributions in *Ha-Tsefira* and *Ha-Asif*. Najmanovich was highly representative of the intellectual current that criticized traditional Jewish life. Already in 1867, in one of his very first short stories in Yiddish, "*Der ovnt in shtot*" (An Evening in Town), we can feel his sensitivity, his positioning as a social writer, concerned with the fate of the little people.⁸² He describes simple characters who are victims of a low level of education, crushed by the social pressure both of ignorant parents and of the *shtetl*. The means of emancipation in these texts is access to modern education, enabling independence from the elders. Very characteristically, his social criticism is internal to Jewish society, without questioning the living conditions of Jews in Eastern Europe.

The aforementioned sources do not cover systematically the whole perimeter of his activities. The dictionaries and encyclopaedias that mention his role in the early diffusion of Esperanto – Sokolow (1889 and 1958), Brockhaus and Efron (1911), Reyzen (1927), *Biographical Dictionary* (1965), Kressel (1967) – typically mention this commitment only in a few words. More generally, his considerable work as a language pedagogue is left in the background: when reported, the pedagogical aspects of his career are simply mentioned, without much comment. Yet this work is considerable, and well worth presenting, as it provides a better understanding of Naymanovich's commitment to Esperanto, and enables us to link his position as a social writer with his activity as an intellectual strongly committed to the education of the poor and deprived.

80. Kressel, *Cyclopedia*, 455–456

81. See Fuks, *Prasa żydowska*.

82. See Naymanovich (1867), "*Der ovnt in shtot*," part 1, 164–168; part 2, 180–184), part 3, 205–207. In the Yiddish original:

דער אבענד אין שטאָט.

7.2. *A committed Esperantist*

To our knowledge, there are no sources documenting the contacts of Naymanovich's with the creator of Esperanto.⁸³ Moreover, we have found no subsequent mention of them in Zamenhof's own writings, nor any allusion to all the early propaganda work aimed at Jewish communities. This is also true of Zamenhof's 1907 interview with the *Jewish Chronicle* in London, where he was asked at length about the relationship between the Esperanto movement and the Jewish world.

The date of publication of the Hebrew and Yiddish manuals, around a year after the first Esperanto manifesto of 1887, nevertheless suggests that Naymanovich was part of Zamenhof's immediate circle of acquaintances.⁸⁴ The latter most likely financed the printing of the two pamphlets, as he did for other Esperantist texts published in Warsaw in those years, thanks to his wife Klara Zilbernik's dowry.⁸⁵ But we have not found any indication of whether Zamenhof or Naymanovich took the initiative in preparing Hebrew or Yiddish textbooks.

It is certain, however, that Zamenhof closely followed the preparation of *Di veltshprakh*. Indeed, the text indicates that: "Dr. Esperanto has looked through the entire brochure. And he found everything in order, except that there may be a number of typographical errors".⁸⁶

This indication is not purely formal. Zamenhof was literate in Yiddish. We also know that he was deeply interested in the language, to the point of writing an original grammar in his youth, which was never published, and which has been rediscovered fairly recently.⁸⁷ Much later, he published a series of articles advocating radical reform of the Yiddish language.⁸⁸ Given his long-lasting interest in Yiddish, he most probably read and controlled Naymanovich's text, and undoubtedly approved of the latter's important work of adaptation.

Besides, *Di veltshprakh* was included in the list of Esperantist works recognized by the

83. The Zamenhof family archives in Warsaw were destroyed in September 1939 by the Germans. See Russell, "Did Esperanto Answer the 'Jewish Question'?" We are not aware of the existence of any private archive dealing with Naymanovich's family. We found no further indication on this issue, whether in the YIVO catalogue (2023) or while doing direct research at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (2019).

84. their respective addresses in Warsaw (Przejazd 9 and Twarda 25) were less than one mile from each other.

85. Korzhenkov, *Homarano*, 88.

86. Najmanovich, *Di veltshprakh*, 66. Yiddish original:

דער ד"ר עספּעראַנטא האט דאס ווערקיל אין גאַנצען דורכגעזעהן. אין האט אלעס געפֿינען אין דער אָרדנונג, אויסער וואס קען זיין מאַנכע דרוקפֿעלער.

Transliteration: der Dr Esperanto hot dos verkl in gantsn durkhgezen. Un hot alts gefinen in der ordnung, oyser vos ken zayn mankhe drufeler.

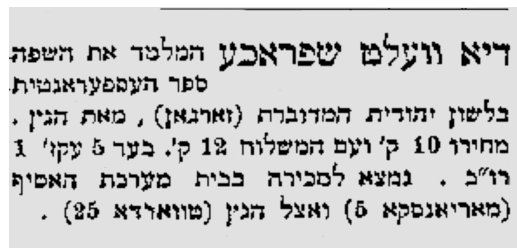
87. See Geller (2012), "Jidiszyta Ludwik Zamenhof;" Geller (2012), "Die vielfach verkannte Jiddische Grammatik;" Geller (2023), "Between Language Planning and the Standard of Yiddish;" and Kiselman (2022), *Zamenhof's Yiddish Grammar*.

88. See Zamenhof (1909), "Vegn yidisher gramatik;" Zamenhof (1910), "Probe fun a yidisher gramatik;" and Zamenhof (1910), "Di probe fun a yidisher gramatik".

Esperanto movement, a list published in 1889 in the movement's first journal, *La Esperantisto*.⁸⁹ Unlike some contributions later judged to be of poor quality and withdrawn from this catalogue,⁹⁰ this work was mentioned for as long as this list, called *Nomaro de l' verkoj pri la lingvo internacia Esperanto*, existed. *Di veltshprakh* was therefore considered useful for Esperanto propaganda. Another indication of the recognition of Najmanovich's work: several advertisements appeared in the Jewish press, probably also financed by Zamenhof. We found inserts for *Di veltshprakh* in two Warsaw publications of 1889, reproduced in Figures 3(a) and 3(b); in the newspaper *Ha-Tsefira* (June 14),⁹¹ and in the yearly journal *Ha-Asif*.⁹²

Fig. 3

a – the *Ha-Tsefira* advertisement (June 14, 1889)



Historic Jewish Press website (www.JPRESS.org.il)
established by the National Library and Tel Aviv University.

89. *La Esperantisto*, November 1889, 16.

90. for instance Julius Steinhaus' contribution *Dr Esperanto's International Tongue* (1888), which is riddled with English mistakes, and of which Zamenhof tried to destroy all existing copies.

91. In 1888, Najmanovich's manual in Hebrew had been the subject of several advertisements in *Ha-Tsefira*.

92. On page 40 of the supplement, *Di veltshprakh* is advertised on the bottom of the page. Note the advertisement for Najmanovich's Esperanto textbook in Hebrew right above, and the simultaneous advertisement for Mendele Moykher Sforim's famous Yiddish novel *Di klyatshe* (The Nag) on the top; Sokolow, *Ha-Asif*.

b – the *Ha-Asif* advertisement (1889 edition)

— 40 —

יצא לאור על נייר טוב ובציורים יפים, ספור

דיא קליאטשע

הוא הספר השני בהוצאה החדשה של כל כתבי
מענדעלע מוכר ספרים
סחירו 1 ר"כ

וכיחד עם הספר הראשון פֿיִשקע דער קרימער א' ר"כ והצי, להקונים
סכום רב ראבאט בנהוג. מוז' דער פֿריוויוו עם תפונת המחבר, שנדפס בסגום
סצער ע"י מוקיריו בפט"ב, נמצאים עתה אך עקעמפ' מעטים, וסחירו 1 ר"כ.

האדרעססא

Соломону Моисеевичу Абрамовичу, Одесса, Базарная ул. д. № 91.

שירי שפת עבר

ספר שני

סא דר' שלמה מאנדעלקערן כלייפציג

סחירו כמעטפה יפה 80 קאפ', וכברך נהמר 1 ר"כ. כעסגרויך 80 קרייצער
או 1 פלאיין. לקונה 5 ספרים בבת אחת, ינהן הששי חנם. וכן גם סחיר 'שירי
שפת עבר' ספר ראשון. למו"ס הנחה גדולה.

האדרעססא

Dr. S. Mandelkern, in Leipzig.

שפה אחת לכלנו

ספר הסלכד את השפה העספעראנמית כלה"ק. סחירו 20 קאפ' ועם המשלוח
22 קאפ'. בעד 5 עק' 1 ר"כ. נמצא להספר בבית מערכת האסוף (סאריאנסקא 5).

דיא וועלטשפראכע.

ספר הסלכד את השפה העספעראנמית בלשון יהודית הסדוברת (זארגאן)
סא דר' הגי"ן. סחירו 20 קאפ' ועם המשלוח 22 קאפ'. בעד 5 עק' 1 ר"כ. נמצא
לסכידה בבית מערכת האסוף (סאריאנסקא 5) ואצל הגי"ן ע"פ האדרעססא

Г. Наймановичу, Варшава, Тварда 25.
H. Najmanowitz, Warschau, Twarda 26.

Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw

There are many clues to suggest that Naymanovich himself was genuinely committed to Esperanto, and that his two textbooks were not simply commissioned by Zamenhof. Firstly, the importance of the adaptation work done in *Di veltshprakh* leads us to believe that Naymanovich was convinced of the value of the new language, and that he had a genuine desire to promote it in popular circles. Otherwise, he would simply have faithfully translated Zamenhof's 1887 text, as he had done in the Hebrew manual. Secondly, at the end of the two brochures, he indicates his personal address, Twarda 25 in Warsaw, for anyone interested in learning Esperanto. Three addresses are mentioned: his own, Zamenhof's, and that of the Hebrew journal *Ha-Tsefira* (of which Naymanovich was a frequent contributor), edited by Nahum Sokolow. It is therefore certain that Zamenhof, Sokolow and Naymanovich worked together to organize correspondence with readers of the 1888 brochures.

Additionally, Naymanovich's commitment to *lingvo internacia* did not end with the publication of his two pamphlets. One year later, when Zamenhof published the first list of the movement's activists with their addresses, Naymanovich's name appeared.⁹³ Then in 1890, when the journalist David Horowitz was preparing a Hebrew-Esperanto dictionary, published in Bila Tserkva (Ukraine), Naymanovich stepped in as proofreader.⁹⁴ In 1891, he subscribed to the movement's first journal, *La Esperantisto*.⁹⁵ In 1892, the same journal reported that Naymanovich had convinced six people to adopt Esperanto.⁹⁶ In 1892 again, he published in *Ha-Tsefira* a funny story that had originally appeared a few months earlier in *La Esperantisto*, and which he had translated into Hebrew. And he is reported to have subscribed in 1894 to an Esperanto book collection called *Biblioteko de la Lingvo Internacia*, published in Nuremberg.⁹⁷

All this suggests that Naymanovich's commitment to Esperanto was far from being incidental, and that his contribution was acknowledged and appreciated by the early activists. But this recognition may not have gone beyond Esperantist circles. For instance, in the tributes published shortly after his death (March 1898) in *Izraelita* and *Ha-Tsefira*, no mention is made of his involvement in the Esperantist movement.⁹⁸

7.3. *Di veltshprakh, first of a series of textbooks*

Esperanto was not the only language to which Naymanovich devoted time and energy. The publication of *Di veltshprakh* actually marked the beginning of a series of textbooks. After Esperanto, he quickly published a large Biblical Hebrew manual (1889, 456 pages long, sold in 24 separate fascicles).⁹⁹ These publications were soon followed by a Polish textbook (1890).¹⁰⁰ To better disseminate his educational works, Najmanovich created the collection *Der hoyzlerer* (The Home Teacher). After his passing, the German and Russian manuals were published by his widow (1900 for the German manual, 1904 and 1910 for the two parts of the Russian textbook).¹⁰¹

All in all, in the last ten years of his life, Naymanovich authored books for learning five

93. *Adresaro*, 23.

94. Horowitz (1890), *Sefer ha-milim*, 1. Naymanovich is thanked for this role on p.1 of Horowitz' dictionary.

95. *La Esperantisto*, June 1891, p.45. It is mentioned that he subscribed directly to L. Zamenhof.

96. See *La Esperantisto*, April 1892 and September 1892.

97. *La Esperantisto*, October 1894, 160.

98. See N. "B.p. H. Najmanowicz.", 114-115, and *Ha-Tsefira*, April 6, 1898, no. 71, 406–407. The latter obituary, published as two separate articles, focuses more on his virtues in general (openness, mildness, etc.) than on precise aspects of his career.

99. See Naymanovich, *More Sfat Kodesh* (מורה שפת קדש).

100. Mentioned in *Izraelita*'s obituary, 115.

101. The censorship permission is dated November 1899 for the German edition (actual publication year: 1900) and November 1904 for the first part of the Russian textbook. This lets us suppose that they were the first editions.

different languages. These manuals, very different in size, have one thing in common: they are all written in Yiddish. The taught languages are those whose learning could enable the least educated Ashkenazi to break their cultural isolation, to appropriate the dominant languages of their environment (Russian, Polish, German), and to access the treasures of Hebrew culture and religion (Biblical Hebrew manual).

These books have another thing in common: they are self-learning manuals. Naymanovich wanted to enable those who had not been able to attend school and/or whose parents could not afford to pay a private tutor for their children to learn these languages at low cost (and he mentions this economic advantage explicitly). The Biblical Hebrew textbook includes two substantial texts, in the preface and conclusion, which can be seen as a synthesis of Naymanovich's ideas and general teaching method.¹⁰² He extends and develops elements already present in *Di veltshprakh* the year before. He claims to be an innovative author, the first to prepare a work of this type.¹⁰³ But the most interesting element for us is that he describes the target audience in greater detail: "anyone with a little common sense can learn on their own, without the help of anyone else, and I'm sure that girls can learn on their own too, as can young apprentices, and also the poorest pupils in 'prayer and study' houses who don't have the opportunity to learn from a master."¹⁰⁴

The question of emancipation through language learning for the two least educated groups – girls and young proletarians – is therefore at the heart of his work. It is repeated from one manual to the next. Naymanovich not only expressed his support for the education and cultural emancipation of the masses, he also forged the tools that should make this emancipation possible.

102. See Naymanovich, *More sfat kodesh* "Preface," 3–5 and "Conclusion," 454–456.

103. *Ibid.*, 454.

104. *Ibid.*, 455. Yiddish original:

ווער עס איז נאר אַ שטיקעל בעל שכל, קענן ער גאר אליין לערנען, אָהן אַ הילף פֿון יעמאַנדען, אזוי וויא בין איבערצויגט, לערנען זיך דאָפֿון אליין אויך מעדכען, און אויך יינגלעך פֿון בעלי מלאכות, הוץ פֿיעלע בית־המדרשניקעס וואס זענין נישט אים שטאנד צו לערנען ביי אַ לעהרער.

Transliteration: *ver es iz nor a shtikl bal seykh, ken er gor aley n lernen, on a hilf fun yemandn, azoy vi bin ikh ibertsoygt, lernen zikh dafun aley n oykh medkhen, un oykh yinglekh fun beli melukhes, khuts fil besmedreshnikes vos zenen nisht im shtand tsu lernen bay a lerer.*

8. Conclusion: which traces of Najmanovich's œuvre ?

What was the impact of Naymanovich's pedagogical writings ? Have they gone unnoticed ? And what was the specific impact of his work to spread Esperanto among Yiddish speakers?

8.1. Writers remember...

As mentioned in the introduction, his textbooks have not, as far as we know, been commented on by specialists in Yiddish culture, who obviously had little interest in it. On the other hand, we have found precise references to them in the works of the illustrious Singer siblings. Esther Kreytman-Singer and Isaac Bashevis Singer in fictional form (1936, 1956), and Israel Joshua Singer in his autobiography (1946), refer to the same textbook by Naymanovich, whose name is specifically mentioned.¹⁰⁵

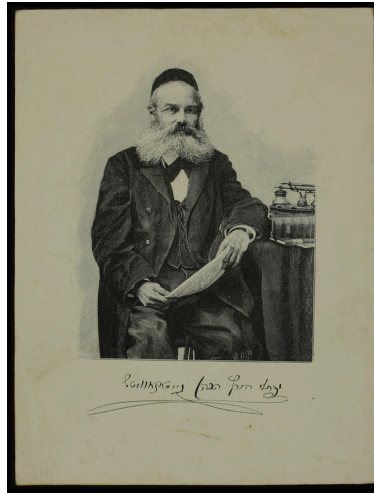
Let us dwell on the family situation described in great detail in *Of a World That Is No More*, Israel Singer's posthumous work (2023 edition). Their father and mother clashed harshly in their childhood: the father, locked into his role as erudite rabbi, vigorously refused to learn the administrative language of the time, Russian. As a result, he was unable to take the exam required to qualify for an official rabbinical post. The mother, a highly educated woman, frustrated at being the *rebbetsin* of a miserable provincial congregation and living in poverty, urged her husband to learn Russian.

"The poverty, isolation, and provincialism of Leoncin never seemed as stark as after a visit to Bilgoraj [...]. Mother [...] still hadn't given up hope of convincing Father to take the official examination and to become a rabbi of a thriving community, and as we passed through Warsaw she spent two rubles for a course promising fluency in Russian speech and grammar. The course was made up of several dozen bound notebooks bearing the portrait of the author, a man with a pince-nez, a neatly trimmed beard, and a tiny skullcap of the type worn by wedding jesters. Under the portrait was imprinted the name Naftali Hertz Neimonowitz."¹⁰⁶

The portrait mentioned by I.J. Singer is possibly the one we displayed in Figure 4, a photograph reproduced on the cover page of many of Naymanovich's textbooks.

105. Kreytman-Singer, *Der sheydim-tants*, 12; I.B. Singer, *Mayn tatn's beys-din shtub*, 73; I.J. Singer, *Fun a velt vos iz nishto mer*, 143–144.

106. I.J. Singer, *Fun a velt vos iz nishto mer*, 143.

Figure 4

Naftali Naymanovich, 1896.

Schwad Reference 02 14 20. Avraham Shevdron Collection - Portraits. National Library of Israel.

But the mother failed, as her husband took refuge in his Hebrew books. If Israel and Esther are to be believed, Naymanovich's educational success in the Singer family was remarkable: everyone made rapid progress in Russian, the mother, the two elder children... but not the father.

Mother finished the course in record time. If it had been she who had had to pass the examination instead of Father, our troubles would have been over. But she was only a female and her quick intelligence was more a detriment than a virtue. Both my sister and I leafed through the textbooks and soon we were chattering away in Russian like magpies.¹⁰⁷

The shared memory of the three siblings is nevertheless astonishing, and thus attests to the fame of the Naymanovich manuals, which had reached the modest village where the Singer family was living at the beginning of the 1900s. The mother, obviously, saw in his Russian manual a promise of a way out of the *shtetl*, which is exactly what Naymanovich wanted to enable by writing all his series of textbooks.

8.2. Yiddish and Esperanto: a long lasting story

Unfortunately, we have found no direct mention of Naymanovich's influence on the Esperanto movement. When Zamenhof was interviewed by the *Jewish Chronicle* on the interest of Esperanto for Jews, he made no reference whatsoever to Naymanovich's work twenty years earlier.¹⁰⁸ Yet, in this interview, he asserted the emancipatory dimension of Esperanto for poor,

107. Ibid., 144. See also the English translation, I.J. Singer, "Of a World That Is No More", translated by Joseph Singer, 952.

108. See Zamenhof, "Esperanto and Jewish Ideals."

uneducated Jews – exactly the thrust of the argument in *Di veltshprakh*.

Although we have found no precise trace of Naymanovich's influence on the spread of Esperanto in Yiddishland, we do know that *Di veltshprakh* was soon distributed outside Warsaw (it was available from Jewish booksellers in Bila Tserkva, Vilna and Czernowitz) and that it was sold for a very long time. In fact, there are at least two reprints of the text, in 1911 and 1919, on the widow's initiative. This little work's publishing career therefore spans at least thirty years! This is a sure sign of its relative popularity, even if we have no idea of print runs.

Nor do we have any idea how Jewish Esperantists were influenced by this text. But we can at least point out that numerous works using Yiddish to promote Esperanto were subsequently published. In an ongoing research, we are trying to identify all possible texts published in Yiddish and connected to the Esperanto movement. So far, we have found 10 other textbooks, booklets or dictionaries and encyclopedias, released in New York (Bresler 1909), Lodz (Lejzerowicz 1926), Bialystok (Lejzerowicz 1927), Warsaw (Unknown author 1930), Vilna (Goldburt 1931), Warsaw (Gelenberg 1931), Warsaw (Naszelski 1932, Amiti 1932), Montreal (Fineman 1966) and finally Jerusalem (Rusak 1969).

If there a legacy to Naymanovich's first textbook in Yiddish, it lies in the permanence of the desire to win Yiddish-speakers over to the Esperanto idea by speaking to them in their own language. Connecting Jewish people to the whole world via Esperanto was therefore an idea that was maintained for a long time in Yiddishland.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Tomas Balkelis, Robin Cura, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny, Uzi Elyada, Itamar Even Zohar, Joshua Fogel, Joël Glasman, Catherine Gousseff, Paweł Jabłoński, Lucie Lamy, Holt Meyer, Yitskhok Niborski, Anne-Cécile Ott, Thomas Rosenthal, and Nicolas Szende, for their readings of successive versions of this text, for their comments and encouragements, and/or their help in accessing sources and reading texts written in languages I do not necessarily understand.

References

Aptroot, Marion, and Gruschka, Roland. *Jiddisch: Geschichte und Kultur einer Weltsprache*. Munich: Beck, 2010.

Baumgardt, Ursula. "Langue minorée.", *ELLAF - la bibliothèque numérique des littératures en langues africaines*. 2021, <http://ellaf.huma-num.fr/langue-minoree/> (accessed 2024/09/14)

Baumgarten, Jean. *Le Yiddish. Histoire d'une langue errante*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2002.

Berger, Suzanne. *Notre première globalisation*. Paris: Seuil, 2003.

Boulton, Marjorie. *Zamenhof: creator of Esperanto*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960.

Dubnov, Simon. *History of the Jews v.5. From the Congress of Vienna to the emergence of Hitler*. S.l. : Yoseloff/A S Barnes, 1973.

Fuks, Marian. *Prasa żydowska w Warszawie 1823 - 1939*. Warsaw: PWN, 1979.

Geller, Ewa. "Jidiszyta Ludwik Zamenhof." In *Ludwik Zamenhof wobec 'kwestii żydowskiej'*. *Wybor źródeł*, edited by Agnieszka Jagodzińska, 27–44. Cracow - Budapest: Austeria, 2012.

Geller, Ewa. "Die vielfach verkannte Jiddische Grammatik des Ludwik Zamenhof." In *Leket : Yiddish Studies Today / Jiddistik heute, Band 1*, edited by Marion Aptroot, Efrat Gal-Ed, Roland Gruschka and Simon Neuberger, 393–414. Dusseldorf: Düsseldorf University Press, 2012.

Geller, Ewa. "Between Language Planning and the Standard of Yiddish: L. L. Zamenhof's Ambivalent Attitude towards the 'Jargon.'" In *Language as Hope: L. L. Zamenhof and the Dream of a Cosmopolitan Wor(l)d*, edited by Viola Beckmann and Liliana Ruth Feierstein, 55–71. Leipzig: Hentrich und Hentrich Verlag, 2023.

Hauptenthal, Reinhard. *Über die Startbedingungen zweier Plansprachen : Schleyers Volapük (1879/80) und Zamenhofs Esperanto (1887)*. S.l. : Iltis, 2013

Ito, Kanzi. "La unua unua unua libro." In *Serta Gratulatoria in honorem Juan Régulo. Volumen II Esperantismo*, edited by Juan Régulo and Universidad de La Laguna, 275–282. La Laguna: Universidad de la Laguna, 1987.

Jagodzińska, Agnieszka. "Doktor Esperanto i safa berura." In *Ludwik Zamenhof wobec 'kwestii żydowskiej'*. *Wybor źródeł*, edited by Agnieszka Jagodzińska, 115–132. Cracow - Budapest: Austeria, 2012.

Kiselman, Christer O. *Zamenhof's Yiddish Grammar and His Universal Language*. Dobřichovice: Kava Pech, 2022.

Korzhenkov [Korŝenkov], Aleksander. *Homarano: La vivo, verkoj kaj ideoj de d-ro L. L. Zamenhof*. Kaunas: Litova Esperanto-Asocio, 2011.

Korzhenkov, Alexander. *Zamenhof: The Life, Works and Ideas of the Author of Esperanto*. Translated by Ian M. Richmond. S.l.: Mondial - Universal Esperanto Association, 2010.

Künzli, Andreas. *L. L. Zamenhof (1859-1917): Esperanto, Hillelismus (Homaranismus) und die jüdische Frage" in Ost- und Westeuropa*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010.

O'Keeffe, Brigid. "An International Language for an Empire of Humanity: L. L. Zamenhof and the Imperial Russian Origins of Esperanto." *East European Jewish Affairs* 49, no. 1 (2019): 1–19.

Petrovsky-Shtern, Yonahan. "Military Service in Russia." *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, s.d. https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Military_Service_in_Russia#author

Piron, Claude. "Contribution à l'étude des apports du yidiche à l'Espéranto : étude comparative faite sur le terrain." *Jewish Language Review*, 4 (1984): 15–29.

Polonsky, Antony B. *The Jews in Poland and Russia, volume I — 1350 to 1881*. Oxford-Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010.

Polonsky Antony B. *The Jews in Poland and Russia, volume II — 1881 to 1914*. Oxford-Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 201.

Rubin, Aaron D., and Kahn, Lily. *Jewish Languages from A to Z*. London-New York: Routledge, 2020.

Russell, James R. "Did Esperanto Answer the 'Jewish Question'?" *The Librarians* (accessed 2022, May 16). <https://blog.nli.org.il/en/lbh-esperanto/>

Schor, Esther. *Bridge of words: Esperanto and the dream of a universal language*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2016.

Sources

Amiti, B.N. *Esperanto* [עספעראנטא]. Warsaw: Jakobson and Goldberg, 1932.

Bresler, Joseph. *Esperanto* [עספעראנטא]. New York: Drukerman, 1909.

Brockhaus and Efron Jewish Encyclopedia, vol.11 [Еврейская энциклопедия Брокгауза и Ефрона]. Sankt-Peterburg: Obshchestvo dlya nauchnykh Evreyskykh Izdaniï and Izdatelstvo Brockhaus-Efron, 1911.

Dąbrauskas K.A. (Jakštas, Adomas). *Mokintuve terptautizkos kalbos*. Tilsitt: Schoenke, 1890.

Einstein, Leopold. *La lingvo internacia als beste Lösung des internationalen Weltsprache-Problems*. Nuremberg: Stein, 1888.

Fineman, Harry. *Yidish-esperanto verterbukh - esperanto-yidish verterbukh* [יידיש-עספעראנטא ווערטערבוך - עספעראנטא-יידיש ווערטערבוך]. S.n.: Montreal, 1966.

First general census of the population of the Russian Empire in 1897 [Первая всеобщая перепись населения Российской Империи 1897 года]. online: <https://www.prlib.ru/item/436627>

Gelenberg, Menachem M. *Esperanto far arbeter* [עספעראנטא פאר ארבעטער], 1, Laboro: Warsaw, 1931.

Goldburt, Ayzik. *Di internatsionale hilfs-shprakh* [די אינטערנאציאנאלע הילפס־שפראך]. Universo: Vilna, 1931.

Ha-Tsefira [הצפירה], newspaper, Warsaw (1874–1931). Edited by Nahum Sokolow.

Horowitz, David. *Sefer ha-milim ha-katan* [ספר המלים הקטן]. S.n.: Bila Tserkva, 1890.

Kressel, Getzel. *Cyclopedia of modern Hebrew literature* [לקסיקון הספרות העברית בדורות האחרונים], vol.2. S.I. : Merhavva, 1967.

Kreytman-Singer, Esther. *Der sheydim-tants* [דער שדיים-טאנץ]. Bzshoza: Warsaw, 1936.

La Esperantisto (monthly journal in Esperanto, 1889-1895). Nuremberg.

Leksikon fun der Nayer Yidisher Literatur [לעקסיקאָן פֿון דער נייער ייִדישער ליטעראַטור] / *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Yiddish Literature*, vol.6. Congress for Jewish Culture: New York, 1965.

Lejzerowicz, Izrael. *Lernbukh fun der internationaler shprakh esperanto* [לערנבוך פֿון דער אינטערנאַציאָנאַלער שפּראַך עספּעראַנטאַ]. Laboro: Lodz, 1926.

Lejzerowicz, Izrael. *Esperanto-Shlisl* [עספּעראַנטאַ-שליסל]. Zbar: Bialystok, 1927.

Libeks, Rudolfs. *Starptautiska waloda no Dr. Esperanto*. Riga: Sichman, 88 p.

Max Margolis, ed. *The Holy Scriptures, according to the Masoretic Text*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917.

N. "B.p. H. Najmanowicz." *Izraelita*, 33, 11 (1898): 114-115.

Naszelski [Našelski], I. *Plena vortaro Esperanto-juda, kun gramatiko*. Bialystok: Naszelski, 1932.

Nature. "The Scientific Value of Volapük", August 9 (1888): 351–355.

Naymanovich, Naftali. "Der ovnt in shtot" [דער אבענד אין שטאדט], part 1, *Warschauer Jüdische Zeitung*, no. 16 (1867): 164–168.

Naymanovich, Naftali. "Der ovnt in shtot" [דער אבענד אין שטאדט], part 2, *Warschauer Jüdische Zeitung*, no. 18 (1867): 180–184.

Naymanovich, Naftali. "Der ovnt in shtot" [דער אבענד אין שטאדט], part 3, *Warschauer Jüdische Zeitung*, no. 21 (1867): 205–207.

Naymanovich, Naftali. *Safah achat lekulanu* [שפה אחת לכלנו]. Warsaw: Tursz, 1888.

Naymanovich, Naftali. *Di veltshprakh* [די וועלטשפראכע]. Warsaw: Levinski, 1888.

Naymanovich, Naftali. *More sfat kodesh* [מורה שפת קדש]. Warsaw: Kelter, 1889.

Naymanovich, Naftali. *Der hoyzlerer polnish, 1-tes heft* [דער הויזלעהרער פאָלניש, 1. טעם העפֿט]. Warsaw: Kelter, 1890.

Naymanovich, Naftali. *Der hoyzlerer daytsh* [דער הויזלעהרער דייטש]. Warsaw: Kelter, 1900.

Naymanovich, Naftali. *Der hoyzlerer rusish, elementarbukh*. [דער הויזלעהרער רוסיש, עלעמענטארבוך]. Warsaw: Levin-Epszstein, 1904.

Naymanovich, Naftali. *Der hoyzlerer rusish, heft 2*
[דער הויזלערהער רוססיש העפֿט 2]. Warsaw: Alapin, 1910.

Phillips, Henry Jr. *An attempt Towards an International Language by Dr Esperanto*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1889.

Rejzen, Zalman. *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese un filologie*
[לעקסיקאָן פון דער ייִדישער ליטעראַטור פרעסע און פֿילאָלאָגיע]. Vilna: Kletskin, 1927.

Rusak, Hanoch. *Entsiklopedisher verterbukh esperanto yidish*. [ענציקלאָפּעדישער ווערטערבוך עספּעראַנטאָ]. Jerusalem: Bayt Zamenhof, 1969.

Shtok, Fradl. "Di erste ban [די ערשטע באַהן]." In *Gezamelte dertseylungen 7-15* [געזאַמעלטע געזאַמעלטע]. New York: Nay-Tsayt, 1919.

Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Mayn tatn's beys-din shtub* [מיין טאַטנ'ס בית־דין שטוב]. New York: Marstin Press, 1956.

Singer, Isidore, ed. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. New York-London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 12 vol., 1901–1906.

Singer, Israel Joshua. *Fun a velt vos iz nishto mer* [פֿון אַ וועלט וואָס איז נישטאַ מער]. New York: Farlag Matones, 1946.

Singer, Israel Joshua. "Of a World That Is No More". In *Israel Joshua Singer: the collected works, Volume II*. edited by Anita Norich. New Milford (USA) and Jerusalem: The Library of the Jewish People, 2023.

Sokolow, Nahum. *Sefer zikaron le-sofre Yiśra'el ha-ḥayim itanu ka-yom* [ספר זכרון לסופרי ישראל]. Warsaw: Halter, 1889.

Sokolow, Nahum, ed. *Ha-Asif* [האַסיף]. Warsaw: Sokolow, 1889

Sokolow, Nahum. *Ishim*, [אַישימ]. Jerusalem: ha-Sifriyah ha-Tsiyonit, 1958.

Steinhaus, Julius. *Dr. Esperanto's international tongue*. Warsaw: Kelter, 1888.

Unknown author (pseudonym: L. Zamenhof). *Esperanto: moderner lernbukh*
[עספּעראַנטאָ: מאָדערנער לאַרנבוך]. Warsaw: Jeruchemson, 1930.

Zamenhof, Ludwik (pseudonym: Dr Esperanto). *Internationale Sprache. Vorrede und vollständiges Lehrbuch*. Warsaw: Gebethner and Wolff, 1887.

Zamenhof, Ludwik (pseudonym: Dr Esperanto). *Język międzynarodowy. Przedmowa i Podręcznik kompletny*. Warsaw: Kelter, 1887.

Zamenhof, Ludwik (pseudonym: Dr Esperanto). *La langue internationale, préface et manuel complet*. Warsaw: Gebethner et Wolff, 1887.

Zamenhof, Ludwik (pseudonym: Dr Esperanto). *Myezhdunarodny yazyk. Pryedislovye i polny uchebnik* [Международный языкъ. Предисловіе и полный учебникъ]. Warsaw: Kelter, 1887.

Zamenhof, Ludwik, ed. *Adresaro de la personoj kiuj ellernis la lingvon 'Esperanto'*. Warsaw: Zamenhof, 1889.

Zamenhof, Ludwik. "El tiro el privata letero de d-ro Zamenhof al s-ro B", *Lingvo Internacia*, no. 6–7 (1896): 115–119.

Zamenhof, Ludwik. "Letero de L.L. Zamenhof al Alfred Michaux". Document written in 1905 and published by in *Homarano: La vivo, verkoj kaj ideoj de d-ro L. L. Zamenhof*, , 9–17. Kaunas: Litova Esperanto-Asocio, 2011.

Zamenhof, Ludwik. "Esperanto and Jewish Ideals. Interview for the Jewish Chronicle with Dr. Zamenhof." *The Jewish Chronicle*, September 6 (1907): 16-18.

Zamenhof, Ludwik (pseudonym: Dr X). "vegn yidisher gramatik un reform in der yidisher shprakh [לעבען און וועגען א יודישער גראמאטיק און רעפארם אין דער יודישער שפראך]." *Lebn un Visnshaft* [לעבען און וויסענשאפט] no. 1 (1909): 50–56.

Zamenhof, Ludwik (pseudonym: Dr X). "probe fun a yidisher gramatik [פראבע פֿון אַ יודישער גראמאטיק]." *Lebn un Visnshaft* [לעבען און וויסענשאפט] no. 7 (1910): 89–96.

Zamenhof, Ludwik (pseudonym: Dr X). "di probe fun a yidisher gramatik [די פראבע פֿון אַ יודישער גראמאטיק]." *Lebn un Visnshaft* [לעבען און וויסענשאפט] no. 9 (1910): 97–104.