

IMPORTANT NOTE ON YIDDISH PRONUNCIATION

Although Yiddish is part of the Germanic family of languages (which also includes Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian and others) it is a unique language with its own unique sounds. The major differences between Yiddish and modern German are as follows:

In Yiddish “L” is pronounced as it is in Standard North American English. The tip of the tongue should be relaxed and touching the back of your bottom teeth. For a Yiddish “L” the middle of your tongue should be touching your hard palate. In a German “L” the tip of the tongue is arched up.

Example: “ALES” (everything)

In Yiddish “Kh” is placed in the throat. You should not feel air on your hard palate. A German “kh” is placed near the front of the mouth.

Example: “IKH” (I)

“R” is very slightly rolled. Either a front roll (as in Russian or Spanish) or a back roll (as in Hebrew, French or German) are correct. There is never an American hard “R.” When a word ends with a vowel followed by and vowel, such as “ER” note that the roll is not articulated, but the articulators close as if about to roll.

Example: “AROYS” (out), “KLER” (explain), “KLOR” (clear)

When a word ends with an unvocalized consonant followed by an “N” there is never a vowel placed between the two consonants. The second to last consonant is not aspirated. The final “N” forms its own syllable.

Example: “HALTN” (to hold)

When a word ends with “BN” there is never a vowel placed between the two consonants. The “B” is not plodded, meaning the lips do not part, and the “N” comes out sounding more like an “M” but it does form its own syllable. There is an overall feeling of the sound being swallowed.

Example: “HOBN” (to have)

There is no “ü” as in German. The letter “u” is pronounced as in the English words **rule**, **cup**, or **book**

Example: “GUT” (good)

Typically, the verb will be the operative word in the sentence and will be stressed. Some words are almost never stressed, such as “ZIKH” (the reflexive, meaning “one self” and “NIT” or “NISHT” (both words meaning “not”) and “KEYN” (Used with “NIT” or “NISHT” to complete a negative statement. Note: Yiddish uses double negatives, as with the French “Ne..Pas”). The only time these words are stressed in a sentence is for the purpose of clarification.

Example 1: Ikh HOB nisht keyn tsayt. (I don’t have time).

Example 2: Zi LERNT zikh in shul. (She is studying [myself] in school.)

Guide to YIVO Standard Yiddish Transliteration System

Vowel sounds:

a as in father

ay as in my

e as in bed (never silent, even at the end of a word -- like in 'kumendike')

ey as in day

i as in bid or a half long vowel as in please (refer to the recordings to know which to use)

o is between aw in dawn and o in done

oy as in boy

u as in rule, cup, or book (refer to the recordings to know which to use)

Consonant sounds:

kh This is the guttural sound in:

Scottish lo**CH**

German a**CH**

Yiddish i**KH**

ts as in 'hur**TS**' (but in Yiddish, it can come at the beginning of a word, as in "tsuris")

tsh ch as in **CHurCH**

zh s as in plea**Sure**

dzh j as in judge