A standardised braille code for Yiddish
proposed by Vivian Aldridge
(last amended 11th December 2000)

Based on the Hebrew braille code as expounded in "ספר הבראיל" by Rivka Rosenzweig, published (1995) by the Central Library for the Blind, Visually Impaired and Handicapped, Netanya, Israel.

Background

As Yiddish is written using the Hebrew alphabet, it is logical to use the Hebrew braille code as the basis for a Yiddish braille code. However, Yiddish does not always use the alphabet in exactly the same way as in Hebrew. Great variations are encountered in Yiddish orthography, depending on the date and place of printing, the type of publication and so on. For instance, older texts may show German influence in the spelling, books from the Soviet Union may be written entirely phonetically and publications of religiously orthodox circles may show full Hebrew pointing.

Within Yiddish itself the alphabet is also used in two fundamentally different ways:
- words borrowed from Hebrew and Aramaic are usually written as is customary for these languages
- words of other origin (Germanic, Slavic, Romantic etc.) are written more or less phonetically using a modified form of the Hebrew alphabet.

A Yiddish braille code must conform to the Hebrew code and at the same time allow for all orthographic variations without becoming excessively complicated.

Rules for the writing of Yiddish

The letters have all been taken from the Hebrew braille code.

- If the print letter can be rendered by various braille signs according to its pronunciation, then the most suitable must be chosen in Yiddish, e.g. khof (and not kof) in the word ikh (איך), beyz and not veyz in the word hobn (האָבן)

- The letters of the pairs beyz and veyz (ב,בֿ), khof and kof (כ,כּ), pey and fey (פּ,פֿ), shin and sin (שׂ,שׁ) are always to be written with the appropriate braille signs, no matter how - or even whether - they are distinguished from one another in the print.

- Sof and tof (ת,תּ), which do not have their own separate letter forms and which are not used in the phonetic component of Yiddish are usually written identically. Where pointing is explicitly indicated in the braille, tof is preceded by the dagesh sign.

- In the phonetically written component of Yiddish, consonantal and vocalic vov (וו,וּ), consonantal and vocalic yud (י,יִ) are always to be differentiated. Vocalic vov is written as melupm-vov whether or not the melupm-dot actually appears in the print. Similarly, vocalic yud is written as khirek-yud, no matter how rendered in the print. Should khirek serve to show that two vowels are not to be read as a diphthong (e.g. in פֿעיִק, רויִק), it should be written as dots 3,5 after the yud. The diphthong vov-yud (וי) is written with kholem-vov and khirek-yud

- When the pointing of a text contributes only to the differentiation of the letters listed here, it need not be explicitly reproduced in the braille. Where individual words or parts of text (e.g. a Hebrew passage) are fully pointed, these should be transcribed accordingly. Where a whole text is written with full pointing, the braille should either follow the print in the use of pointing (including the placing of komets, pasekh and khirek) or reproduce only as much of the pointing as is "usual" for Yiddish.

- The use of komets and pasekh with alef and pasekh with tsvey-yudn should follow the print.

- The practice of the print should also be followed in the use or omission of geyresh to separate elements of Semitic and phonetic spelling within a word (שבתדיק, שבת׳דיק; מתנהלע, מתנה׳לע).

A further development could be considered for use in textbooks and works which require a "facsimile" reproduction of the text. The presence of the dagesh dot within a letter would be indicated by preceding it by the sign for dagesh (dot 5), the use of the rafe overscore by the use of, for instance, the sign 4,5 (which appears to me not to be needed for Hebrew braille). Where vocalic yud is written with the khirek dot, this would be shown in braille by the appropriate braille sign (dots 3,5) and the kholem by dots 2,4,6.

Examples:

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