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 (שׁ,שׂ) 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,ו), consonantal and vocalic yud (י,י) 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:

⠿⠿ ⠿⠿   ⠿⠿⠿⠿   ⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿   ⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿   אַ ליד לכּבֿוד פּורים

⠿⠿   ⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿   ⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿   ⠿⠿⠿⠿⠿   די ייִדישע מלכּה אסתּר

Listings of letters, punctuation and braille auxiliary signs

Letters		Name	Dots
א		shtumer alef	1
אָ		komets-alef	1 - 1,2,6
אַ		pasekh-alef	1 - 1,4
ב		beyz	1,2
בֿ		veyz	1,2,3,6
ג		giml	1,2,4,5
ד		daled	1,4,5
ה		hey	1,2,5
ו		vov (consonantal only) *	2,4,5,6
וו		tsvey vovn	2,4,5,6 - 2,4,5,6
וּ		melupm-vov *	1,3,6
וֹ		kholem-vov	1,3,5
וי		vov-yud	1,3,5 - 2,4
ז		zayin	1,3,5,6
ח		khes	1,3,4,6
ט		tes	2,3,4,5
י		yud (consonantal only) **	2,4,5
יִ		khirek-yud **	2,4
יי		tsvey yudn	2,4 - 2,4
ײַ		pasekh-tsvey-yudn	2,4 - 2,4 - 1,4
ך כ		khof, langer khof	1,6
כּ		kof	1,3
ל		lamed	1,2,3
ם מ		men, shlos-men	1,3,4
ן נ		nun, langer nun	1,3,4,5
ס		samekh	2,3,4
ע		ayen	1,2,4,6
פּ		pey	1,2,3,4
ף פֿ		fey, langer fey	1,2,4
ץ צ		tsadek, langer tsadek	2,3,4,6
ק		kuf	1,2,3,4,5
ר		reysh	1,2,3,5
שׁ		shin	1,4,6
שׂ		sin	1,5,6
ת ת		sof, tof	1,4,5,6

* In phonetically written Yiddish words, vocalic vov is always written with the braille sign for melupm-vov

** In phonetically written Yiddish words, vocalic yud is always written with the braille sign for khirek-yud

Punctuation		Name	Dots
,	⠂	comma	2
;	⠆	semicolon	2,3
:	⠒	colon	2,5
.	⠲	period	2,5,6
?	⠢	query	2,6
!	⠖	exclamation	2,3,5
'	⠄	apostrophe (geyresh)	3
"	⠦	quotes (gershaim)	2,3,6
/	⠌	oblique stroke	3,4
)	⠶	parenthesis (open)	2,3,5,6
(	⠶	parenthesis (close)	2,3,5,6
]	⠠⠶	square bracket (open)	6 - 2,3,5,6
[	⠶⠄	square bracket (close)	2,3,5,6 - 3
}	⠿	brace (open)	1,2,3,4,6
{	⠽	brace (close)	1,3,4,5,6
...	⠲⠲⠲	ellipsis	2,5,6 - 2,5,6 - 2,5,6
*	⠔⠔	asterisk	3,5 - 3,5
-	⠤	hyphen (makef)	3,6
	⠤⠤	dash	3,6 - 3,6
	⠤⠤⠤⠤	long dash	3,6 - 3,6 - 3,6 - 3,6

Sign	Use	Dots
⠼	number sign (with ⠁ ⠃ ⠉ ⠙ ⠑ ⠋ ⠛ ⠓ ⠊ ⠚)	3,4,5,6
⠨	word in bold or emphatic print *	4,6
⠨	word in a non-Hebrew alphabet *	4,6
⠰	small Latin letter(s) **	5,6
⠠	capital Latin letter (followed by small ones) **	6
⠠⠠	capital Latin letters **	6 - 6
⠰	stressed syllable	4,5,6
⠠⠄	end of emphasis etc.	6 - 3
⠐	dagesh	5

* Where three or more words appear in bold print or in a non-Hebrew alphabet this sign is doubled before the first word and appears singly before the last.

** Whole words and phrases appearing in Latin letters are introduced by the sign 4,6 and then one of these signs. When single letters are used as a literal ordinal system (e.g. for paragraphs) the sign 4,6 is not required.

Points for discussion

The following questions - and more - arise in connection with the proposal. My solutions are based on the analysis of many examples of Yiddish written in many different ways. A major consideration was that the form of a word should not be completely altered depending on the style of the print text that it was transcribed from.

1. Is it right to differentiate letters in braille, where they appear the same in print? As Hebrew braille does this, it seems appropriate - and even necessary - to do so in braille, too.

2. Is it correct to always interpret vocalic yud in phonetic orthography as equivalent to khirek yud?

3. Is the yud in the ending yud-ayin of many internationalisms vocalic or consonantal? Is this standard for all such words or does it depend on the preceding sounds? Are there regional variations?

4. Where a khirek has been placed under a yud as a diaeresis to differentiate two vowels from a diphthong as vocalic yud with a separate khirek, is it sensible to write both vocalic yud and a separate khirek?

5. Are both the yudn in the letters tsvey-yudn and paekh-tsvey-yudn vocalic? The placing of the pasekh under both and, very rarely, the placing of two khireks would seem to support this. The YIVO transcription as EY and AY respectively may raise some doubt.

6. Should the pasekh of pasekh-tsvey-yudn be written after the first or the second yud in braille? In works where this Yiddish letter was not available for printing, it is almost invariable written under the first yud. If the two yudn function as one letter, it seems more appropriate to place the pasekh after the pair.

7. Is it correct to always interpret vocalic vov in phonetic orthography as equivalent to melupm-vov, except in the combination vov-yud?

8. When vocalic vov appears in Semitic orthography, are there situations when it is not sensible to differentiate between melupm-vov and kholem-vov? Is a differentiation in the various Semitic endings with vov and sof feasible?

9. Is the yud in vov-yud really equivalent to one with kholem? (Orthodox story books seem to confirm by pointing the vov so.)

10. Should sof and tof always be differentiated by the dagesh sign when this appears in print? Are there examples of words where the presence or omission of dagesh would be different in Hebrew and Yiddish?

Examples as case studies

The following passages were chosen as examples of different styles of language, spelling, pointing, and other features. As far as possible the exact pointing of the original has been reproduced.

Example 1
The opening passage of "דער בעל־תשובה" **by Isaac Bashevis Singer, published by the I. L. Peretz Publishing House in Tel-Aviv in 1974.**

– ווו זאָל איך אָנהויבן ? קודם לאָמיר אייך זאָגן ווער איך בין. איך בין, זייט וויסן, אַ רבי׳ש אייניקעל. שטאַמען שטאַם איך פֿון ״ייד הקדוש״.[a] פֿון דער מאמעס צד שטאַם איך פֿון ש״ך און ווער ס׳שטאַמט פֿון ש״ך, שטאַמט אויך פֿון רמ״א, פֿון רש״י[a] און טאַקע פֿון דוד־המלך. אַזוי זאָגן די יחוס־בריוו. וואָס איז די נפקא־מינה ? איך בין געווען אין פּוילן אין 1939 ווען די נאַציס ימח שמם האָבן באָמבאַרדירט וואַרשע. כ׳בין אַנטלאָפֿן מיט די אַנדערע יידן איבער דער פּראַגנער בריק און בין אַוועק צו פֿוס קיין ביאַליסטאָק.[b] איך בין יינגער פֿון אייך מיט אַ פֿאָר יאָר, כאָטש איך האָב אַ ווייסע באָרד. איכ׳ל אייך דאָ נישט אויסדערצײַלן מײַן גאַנצע ביאָגראַפֿיע.[c] ס׳וואָלט צו לאַנג דויערן.

(c)

(a) If these words are not correctly brailled it is owing to my extremely rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew.

(b) Identifying the first yud as consonantal requires knowledge of the pronunciation of the name which cannot always be assumed. Although this makes transcription more difficult it seems to me to be acceptable. In various languages the structure of the braille code requires knowledge of names for their correct transcription. The same difficulty would be encountered in the transcription into a Latin print script.

(c) The first yud contrasts with (b). In another work, I have encountered this word with a khirek under the first yud. Is the second yud really consonantal?

Example 2
From "אָנגעקומען אין רעדאַקציע" **in the** פֿאָרווערטס **of 13th October 2000**

"דער ייִדישער טעם־טעם" – אַ פּעריאָדיש בלעטל פֿאַר ייִדיש־לערנערס. אַ פּובליקאַציע פֿון דער "געזעלשאַפֿט פֿאַרן ייִדיש־לימוד און פֿאַר דער מעדעם־ביבליאָטעק", פּאַריז, אײַר(a) תּשׂ"ס/יוני(b) 2000. דער נומער איז אַ ספּעציעלער(c) נומער אויף דער טעמע "ייִדיש אין דער אײראָפּעיִשער(d) קולטור־ירושה".

"גרינע מדינה/grine medine" – אַ צוויי־שפּראַכיקע ליטעראַרישע צײַטשריפֿט אויף ייִדיש און האָלענדיש. דאָס איז דער ערשטער נומער פֿון דעם זשורנאַל וואָס דרוקט איבער פֿון דער קלאַסישער ליטעראַטור (אליעזר שטיינבערג) און אויך פֿון דער נײַער (לעוו בערינסקי).

(a) (b)

(c)

(d)

(a) Are the yudn really vocalic and consonantal respectively?
(b) As sof and tof have the same numerical value, there is no need to differentiate between them.
(c) Is the yud vocalic or consonantal?
(d) An example of a khirek used as a diaeresis to differentiate the vowel combination from a diphthong.

Example 3
From "קיין בעסער לאנד, ווי רוסלאנד, איז אף דער וואלט ניט פֿאראן" **by Michail Ostrovsky printed in Moscow in a supplement to** "סאָװעטיש היימלאַנד" **Nr. 4, 1987.**

אין 1844 האָט ניקאָלײַ I באפֿוילן, עס זאָלן גענרינדעט ווערן ראבינער־שולן. צוויי אזעלכע האָט מען אין טכום־האַמוישעוו געעפֿנעט אין 1847 – איינע אין ווילנע און די צווייטע אין זשיטאָמיר. לעכאטכילע זיינען אהין אריינגעטראָגן קימאט אויסשליסלעך קינדער פֿון אָרעמעליַיט, ווערעמען עס האָבן צוגעצווינגען די סטיפענדיעס, דערנאָך האָבן אין די שולן אָנגעהויבן אָפֿגעבן זייערע קינדער אויך פֿאַרמעגלעכבע יידן, ווייל די שילער זיינען באפֿרייט געוואָרן פֿון דער ביטערער סאָלדאַטן־דינסט, וועלכע האָט זיך גענצויגן ביז 25 יאָר. די אופֿזייר אין די ראבינער־שולן זיינען געווען קריסטן. די האָשגאַכבע אף די יידישע לימודים האָט מען אָנפֿאַרטרויט אינספעקטאָרן־יידן. די לערער האָבן געפֿירט דעם אונטעריכט פֿון די יידישע לימודים אף דער דייטשישער שפראך. רוסיש און די אלגעמיינע לימודים האָבן די שילער דעלערנט אין פֿאַרנעם פֿונעם גימנאזיע־קורס. ווי עס דערצײַלן די מיטצײַטלער, איז דער אונטעריכט פֿון אלגעמיינע לימודים אין די ראבינער־שולן צונעגאַנגען מיט מער דערפֿאָלג איידער פֿון די יידישע. אדאנק דעם זיינען די ראבינער־שולן געווארן די נעסטן פֿון אופֿקלערערישער טעטיקײַט אין טכום־האַמוישעוו.