

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HEBREW LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

Volume 2
G–O

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BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2013

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Lekoudesch

Lekoudesch (also Lechoudesch, Lottegorsich, Lothekolisch, etc.) is the name given by users to a special vocabulary of mainly Hebrew origin that was used as a means of in-group and secret communication among Jewish traders in rural areas in Germany and neighboring countries and regions (the Netherlands, Alsace and Lorraine, Switzerland). The most frequent use of Lekoudesch was in the context of the cattle trade, at cattle markets and among butchers. The original group of users included Jewish merchants who had access to the vocabulary of the Hebrew Scriptures through religious education and who drew on this knowledge to replace everyday expressions in order to conceal the content of their communication from outsiders. In part, secret communication among partners in the presence of a client provided an advantage during trade negotiations. The Hebrew words, pronounced in the Ashkenazi way (that is, integrated into German phonology), were simply inserted into local and regional varieties of German. While there is some evidence of local varieties, by and large the same Hebrew-derived vocabulary was used by Jewish traders in various regions, indicating a kind of multi-regional speech community. The name of the speech form is a euphemism based on Hebrew לשון הקודש *loschen ha-koude-sch* 'the holy tongue', the traditional term for Biblical Hebrew.

Attestation of Lekoudesch in the form of documentation of the speech of Jewish merchants comes from the province of Eastern Friesland in northwestern Germany, the Netherlands, Alsace, the Rhine area and Hessa, southwestern Germany and Bavaria, and Switzerland, and this seems to have constituted the original area in which the code was used, though it may well have been more widespread and in use in eastern parts of Germany, too. Use of Lekoudesch declined in the first decades of the 20th century as a result of the rapid urbanization of the Jewish population in Germany following emancipation, but its use was still attested in rural communities in the inter-war period. None of the rural Jewish communities survived in Germany after World War II, and the original

Lekouesch perished or dispersed along with its speakers. However, the vocabulary survived for one further generation in a small number of communities in southwestern Germany, where it had been acquired by non-Jewish young men who were employed in the cattle industry, and who maintained it as a kind of in-group identity badge and social marker. In the village of Schopfloch in Bavaria, attempts were made in the 1980s and 1990s to promote awareness of a closely-related variety named *Lachouesch* through evening classes and the publication of teaching and learning materials.

Lekouesch is based on the insertion of Hebrew-derived words into dialectal conversation in German. While in principle it appears that any Hebrew expression that was likely to be understood by interlocutors could be selected, in practice most speakers appear to have favored a fixed inventory of around three to four hundred words. Some of those were creative compositions that emerged through usage in Lekouesch itself and were not simply copied over from Hebrew sources, for example, *schocha majim lou kuhlef* ‘black coffee’ (= שחור מים לא חלב *šaxor mayim lo xalav* ‘black water no milk’), or *kassirrosch* ‘pig-head’ (= חזיר ראש *xazir roš*). Such compositions always follow the demands of German word order, rather than those of Hebrew word order. The vocabulary consists almost entirely of content words (nouns, verbs, adjective, and some adverbs), and the use of grammatical words is limited. Among the more widespread Hebrew-derived function words is the negative particle *lou* (= לא *lo*), numerals, and the existential verb *schäff* ‘to be, to exist, to be present’, from Hebrew שב *šev* ‘sit (ms imperative)’. While word and sentence structure usually follow the rules of (dialectal) German grammar, there is an occasional tendency to simplify phrases, as in *alle gimmel dof* ‘all three [are] good (= טוב *tov*)’ (→ Germanic Languages, Hebrew Loanwords in).

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For sound recordings:

<http://languagecontact.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/ELA/languages/Lekouesch.html>

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Lexical Affixes

Lexical affixes are particles, usually prepositions, which are attached to adjectives and nouns (and, in rare cases, to adverbs as well), usually as prefixes, but occasionally also as suffixes. They modify the meaning of the word to which they are attached, and form a highly cohesive structure with it.

This type of construction is very common in the languages of the West, but almost completely absent from the early stages of Hebrew. Small wonder, then, that many of the prefixes are borrowed: פאן-ערבי *pan-ʿaravi* ‘pan-Arab’, אַנטי-מוסרי *anti-musari* ‘immoral’, פרו-מערבי *pro-mʿaravi* ‘pro-Western’, אולטרה-סגולי *ultra-sguli* ‘ultra-violet’.

Many borrowed prefixes also come from Aramaic, whose lexicon has been extensively mined to expand the vocabulary of Modern Hebrew: בתר-מקראי *batar-miqraʿi* ‘post-biblical’, חד-צדדי *xad-šdadi* ‘unilateral’, טרום-צבאי *trom-švaʿi* ‘pre-induction (into the army)’, קדם-אקדמי *qdam-ʿaqademi* ‘pre-academic’, תלת-אופן *tlat-ʿofan* ‘tricycle’, תת-עורי *tat-ʿori* ‘subcutaneous’. Some are of Indo-European origin: דו-משמעי *du-mašmaʿi* ‘ambiguous’, רה-ארגון *re-ʿirgun* ‘reorganization’. A number of affixes are attached to the end of the construction’s stem: חברת-בת *xevra-bat* (or חברת-בתי *xevrat-bat*) ‘subsidiary company’, ליגת-על *ligat-ʿal* ‘premier league’, מתווך-על *metavex-ʿal* ‘super mediator’, תכנית-אב *toxnit-ʿav* ‘master plan’.