
Yiddish Language Rights in Congress Poland during the First World War

The Social Implications of Linguistic Recognition

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INTRODUCTION

THE OFFICIAL RECOGNITION of Yiddish language rights in Congress Poland during the First World War had significant implications for a territory with a mixed ethnic composition. This essay focuses on the rights of the Yiddish-speaking community to use its distinctive vernacular in administrative procedures and schooling, in comparison with other ethno-linguistic groups in the same region. The concept of language rights here reflects the German notion of *Sprachenrecht*, which may be translated as the legal regulation of the use of a language in public life as part of broader inter-ethnic regulations in a multi-ethnic country.

The importance of language rights in a multilingual society is found at many levels. First there is the practical need to regulate communication between the bureaucratic apparatus and the individuals addressing it. Second, accepting language rights is a symbolic means of legitimizing the existence of a minority group by recognizing its vernacular. In contrast, non-recognition of its vernacular serves to exclude a group's ethnic identity altogether. Third, linguistic recognition affects a society's openness towards advancing or hampering the social mobility of the minority group.

This essay offers an analysis of the attitudes shown by the changing administrations towards the languages of non-dominant ethnic groups in Congress Poland during the First World War and the role these attitudes played in the state-building process. As Miroslav Hroch points out, linguistic demands by non-dominant ethnic groups emerged stage by stage, gradually and cumulatively. The highest stage was full equality, and involved the introduction of the non-dominant language into the administration, bureaucracy, and politics. The crucial point, Hroch explains, was when the demand for linguistic equality in administrative and political life

endangered the monopolistic position of the state elites. Sooner or later, this demand turned into a struggle for positions in the administration. Under such circumstances, Hroch argues, the appeal for linguistic equality reflected more than mere national prestige or symbolic values: it contributed to the emergence of a nationally significant conflict of interests—an intrinsic part of the nation-building process.¹ In Hroch's argument, the non-recognition of a language symbolized strategies of exclusion.

In the same vein, according to Pierre Bourdieu, culture is, *inter alia*, a resource for domination in which intellectuals play key roles as specialists of cultural production and are creators of symbolic power.² In this respect, the recognition of certain cultural capital (in the present case, the languages of minority groups, and, specifically, Yiddish), or its exclusion, was a strategy to encourage or block the admission of certain groups into the 'state nobility', to use one of Bourdieu's concepts, referring to elites whose power stems from state recognition of their cultural capital as a legitimation of their claim to power in the state.³

This essay tests Hroch's and Bourdieu's contentions empirically regarding the recognition of various vernaculars in Congress Poland during the First World War by examining administrative measures intended, I will show, either to safeguard Jews from Polonization or from exposure to it, or to guarantee/exclude the status of Yiddish as a recognized minority language. Several of Hroch's basic premises provide a key to understanding the contradictory policies regarding the Yiddish language during the First World War and its aftermath, while certain modifications of these premises are needed in order to understand the linguistic policy towards the languages of other non-dominant groups.

The essay has three main parts. The first discusses the policies of the German authorities in the occupied areas until 1917. The second focuses on decisions made by the Polish administration established during 1917, which constituted the first steps of the Polish state in formation. The third part analyses the developments and inconsistencies outlined in the first two parts in light of the theoretical concepts presented there, and discusses their implications.

GERMAN POLICIES IN THE OCCUPIED AREAS UNTIL 1917

A New Era, New Policy, New Languages

The First World War was a time of pivotal importance to the national struggle for Polish independence, with the status of language constituting a cardinal issue in

¹ M. Hroch, *The Social Interpretation of Linguistic Demands in European National Movements* (Florence, 1994), 13–20; id., *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*, trans. B. Fowkes (Cambridge, 1985), 175–91.

² D. Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago, 1997), 1–14, 189–246.

³ P. Bourdieu, *La Noblesse d'état: Grandes écoles et esprit de corps* (Paris, 1989); in English, P. Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, trans. L. C. Clough (Stanford, Calif., 1996).

this endeavour. In the main, the Polish national movement demanded exclusivity for the Polish language and culture and the entrenchment of this status in the laws of the Polish lands. The Polish national movement generally insisted that Jews adopt the Polish language in their educational institutions. In the same period, ensuring the status of their language was also a major issue in the Jewish struggle for recognition of their national rights in eastern Europe. The Jewish nationalist movement, in all its factions, demanded the recognition of Yiddish and/or Hebrew (the internal Jewish dispute over this issue is well known) and appropriate legislation guaranteeing its official status. This issue, which was raised before the war, led to an intense collision between the nationalist movements of Jews and Poles during the war.⁴

Both movements faced new conditions with the outbreak of the war. Congress Poland came under the occupation of the Central Powers—Germany and Austria—from 1915 to 1918. As part of German policy, the occupiers eliminated Russian as a ‘societal language’. The concept of ‘societal language’, as defined by Will Kymlicka, refers to the value of a language recognized by the state and used in a wide range of state institutions, such as schools, the legal system, the economy, and the government.⁵ The elimination of Russian and its replacement in Congress Poland by German, later to be followed by Polish, engendered and intensified the use of various vernaculars and led to an explosion of the politics of the vernacular.

That the general German aim was to bring central Europe under German control is well known. However, the means for establishing this control was a major source of contention between various officials and ministries within the German regime and administration, as, from the German point of view, there was no ideal solution to the problem of how to rule the area it had occupied. Some advocated direct German rule over Poland and substantial regions in western Russia (the supporters of this approach were mainly connected with *Junker* circles, most prominently General Erich von Ludendorff and Field Marshal Paul von

⁴ For an excellent introduction to the rise of antisemitism and ethno-national tension in this period, see F. Golczewski, *Polnisch-jüdische Beziehungen, 1881–1922: Eine Studie zur Geschichte des Antisemitismus in Ost-Europa* (Wiesbaden, 1981). The literature on the growth of both Polish and Jewish nationalism is vast. On the rise of Polish xenophobic nationalism, see B. Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (New York, 2000); T. R. Weeks, *From Assimilation to Antisemitism: The ‘Jewish Question’ in Poland, 1850–1914* (DeKalb, Ill., 2006). Lastly, Frank Schuster and Konrad Zieliński have dealt with Jewish–Polish relations in Congress Poland during the First World War. See F. Schuster, *Zwischen allen Fronten: Osteuropäische Juden während des Ersten Weltkrieges, 1914–1919* (Cologne, 2004), esp. 251–7, 259–63, 265–82, 328–415; K. Zieliński, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach Królestwa Polskiego w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej* (Lublin, 2005). For an introduction to the rise of Jewish nationalism, see Jonathan Frankel’s seminal *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge, 1981); E. Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics* (New York, 1993).

⁵ W. Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (Oxford, 2001), 25–7, 53.

Hindenburg, who headed the German forces in eastern Europe) by annexing vast territories to Germany or by transforming them into a quasi-colonial region.

However, the main drawback of direct rule, according to its opponents, was that annexing vast areas of the western part of the tsarist empire, including Congress Poland, to the Wilhelmist empire would flood it with masses of non-German peoples, mainly Poles and, additionally, Jews, whose loyalty to the German state was suspect. Moreover, this would bring about an unwelcome demographic shift in the structure of the German population generally and the Prussian population in particular, which could put the very stability of the empire at risk. Instead, they advocated indirect rule, proposing several options regarding structure and implementation. One was the Austro-Polish option: annexing large sections of Congress Poland to Austria. Another was joint Austrian–German control of Poland and the establishment of a large buffer state or, alternatively, smaller buffer states, which would be quasi-independent satellites of Germany. These options were meant to take effect after the more or less extensive annexation of portions of western and north-western Congress Poland, as well as parts of the districts of Kurland, Kovno, and Grodno lying north and east of Congress Poland.⁶

Ultimately, the German authorities were unable to agree on the manner of ruling the region or the extent of the areas to be annexed. During the course of the war, the pendulum swung in favour of one solution or another depending on circumstances, personalities, and political and belligerent constellations.

The Question of Language and Schools: The Case of Łódź

Until mid-1915, Łódź was the largest Polish city to fall into German hands. It was home to three major ethnic groups: Poles, Jews, and Germans. The percentage of Jews among the city's populace rose from 32.6 per cent in 1911 (167,100 Jews in a total population of half a million), to 40.1 per cent in 1918, despite the decline of the absolute number of the city's inhabitants due to the ravages of the war (137,200 Jews in an overall population of 341,800). During the same period, the proportion

⁶ On the German war aims, see esp. L. Grosfeld, 'La Pologne dans les plans impérialistes allemands pendant la Grande Guerre 1914–1918 et l'acte du 5 Novembre 1916', in *La Pologne au X^e Congrès international des sciences historiques à Rome* (Warsaw, 1955), 327–56; I. Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen, 1914–1918: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kriegszielpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Lübeck and Hamburg, 1960), 41–114, 160–3; F. Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (London, 1967), 96–110, 113–17, 179–83, 271–3 (abridged translation of his *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland, 1914/1918*, Düsseldorf, 1961); L. Grosfeld, *Polityka państw centralnych wobec sprawy polskiej w latach pierwszej wojny światowej* (Warsaw, 1962), esp. 54–127; E. Basler, *Deutschlands Annexionspolitik in Polen und im Baltikum, 1914–1918* (Berlin, 1962), 25–158, 385; W. Sukiennicki, *East Central Europe during World War I: From Foreign Domination to National Independence* (Boulder, Colo., 1984), mainly 118–22, 132–46, 240–8, 333–42. See also F. Fischer, 'Twenty-Five Years Later: Looking Back at the "Fischer Controversy" and its Consequences', *Central European History*, 21 (1988), 207–23; K. Jarausch, 'Revising German History: Bethmann Hollweg Revisited', *Central European History*, 21 (1988), 224–43.

of Poles in Łódź declined from 52.1 per cent in 1911 to 47.6 per cent in 1918. The German segment of the local population declined during the war years, stabilizing at 11–12 per cent of the populace.⁷

From the very beginning of the German occupation, the occupation forces tried to eliminate Russian as the societal language. Various regulations removed the Russian language from the public sphere: it was banned in all municipal institutions, the study of it or instruction in it was forbidden, and the use of Russian books in schools was made illegal.⁸ Initially, the municipal council maintained the existing school system, but since Russian had been banned from the public sphere, Polish became the language of instruction and then the curriculum was also Polonized.⁹

In the spring of 1915, members of the Komitee für den Osten (Committee for the East, i.e. eastern Europe; KfdO)—a Jewish committee composed of Zionist leaders and other prominent Jews in Germany—visited Łódź to meet with important officials in the German administration and to propose a Jewish autonomist option as an alternative to the Polish one for backing German rule in the occupied territories.¹⁰ The committee urged the occupation authorities to protect the Jewish population from the trend towards Polonization displayed by municipal authorities and their education department.¹¹

The German occupation officials in charge of education matters, assenting to the idea that the Jewish population should be safeguarded against the movement towards Polonization,¹² forbade Jewish schools to use Polish as the language of instruction,¹³ prohibiting it¹⁴ on the basis of essentialist arguments ('Jews in Poland need not be Poles, nor can they be')¹⁵ as well as instrumental ones ('only 200 Jews use the Polish language').¹⁶ Rather, Jewish children would study German in their own segregated schools, since the occupation authorities decreed, in 1915, that each sector of the population would be educated separately.¹⁷ This reflected a

⁷ J. Janczak, 'Struktura narodowościowa Łodzi w latach 1820–1939', in W. Puś and S. Liszewski (eds.), *Dzieje Żydów w Łodzi, 1820–1944: Wybrane problemy* (Łódź, 1991), 47–8.

⁸ 'Russisch verboten', *Die Zeit*, 3 Sept. 1915.

⁹ Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie (hereafter APKr), NKN 86: 'Sprawa szkolna w Łodzi'.

¹⁰ Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA), A15/VIII/13: Max Bodenheimer, 'Bericht über die im Auftrage des "Komitees fuer den Osten" im Mai–Juni 1915 unternommene Reise nach Russisch-Polen, Zweite Ausgabe, als Manuskript gedruckt' (n.p., n.d. [Berlin, 1915]), 1–6.

¹¹ CZA, A15/VIII/8: 'Bericht über das jüdische Schulwesen in Lodz', 21 May 1915.

¹² CZA, A15/VIII/8: 'Bericht über Unterredungen mit Herrn von Oppen, Graf Lerchenfeld, Rittmeister Stibel, von Kries (juni 1915)'; M. Hertz, *Łódź w czasie Wielkiej Wojny* (Łódź, 1933), 182–4.

¹³ CZA, A15/VIII/9a: 'Notizen über die Tätigkeit des Herrn Justizrat Dr. Bodenheimer in Lodz (Zum Protokoll über die Sitzung vom 11.VI.15)'; Hertz, *Łódź w czasie Wielkiej Wojny*, 182–4.

¹⁴ CZA, A15/VIII/9a: 'Notizen über die Tätigkeit des Herrn Justizrat Dr. Bodenheimer in Lodz (Zum Protokoll über die Sitzung vom 11.VI.15)'; 'Verordnung betreffend Regelung des Schulwesens', *Deutsche Lodzener Zeitung*, 7 Sept. 1915. See also Schuster, *Zwischen allen Fronten*, 360–1.

¹⁵ APKr, NKN 86: 'Sprawa szkolna w Łodzi'.

¹⁶ APKr, NKN 88: 'Sprawozdanie z Łodzi'.

¹⁷ CZA, A15/VIII/2c: Moritz Sobernheim to Max Bodenheimer, 2 Sept. 1915; 'Verordnung betreffend Regelung des Schulwesens', *Deutsche Lodzener Zeitung*, 7 Sept. 1915.

curious policy of selective Germanization of the Jews, aimed at reinforcing German in the public sphere even though the population adopting it remained excluded from the German ethno-national sector. In late summer, on 24 August 1915, the occupation authorities issued a Regulation for the Organization of Schools (*Verordnung betreffend Regelung des Schulwesens*) aimed at reorganizing the education systems in the areas of Congress Poland on the left bank of the Vistula (occupied by Germany) in preparation for the start of the new school year.¹⁸ The regulation established a religious criterion for school attendance, officially recognizing three religious groups: Catholics, Protestants, and Jews.¹⁹ The ruling also stipulated that German would be the language of instruction in Protestant and Jewish schools.²⁰ This directive reflected the espousal of a thesis linking the national-cultural interests of the Jewish and Protestant minorities (the latter regarded as 'German'), placing both these population groups under the aegis of German culture and language.

The regulation was opposed by almost every segment of both Jewish and Polish society. The Polish press and the Polish establishment protested against separating Jewish pupils from their Polish counterparts, and demanded that Jews receive a Polish education. According to statements by various wings of the Polish national movement, the decision to have Jewish children study in the German language would turn the Jews into a tool for Germanization in Polish territory²¹ and be an obstacle to fulfilling the movement's aspiration of establishing a universal school system with a Polish national orientation.²² The Poles of the Mosaic Faith (*Polen Mosaischer Konfession*), an integrationist group, joined the Polish majority in this chorus of protest.²³

¹⁸ CZA, Z3/140: Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland to Kolenscher, 8 Sept. 1915; 'Verordnung betreffend Regelung des Schulwesens', *Deutsche Lodzzer Zeitung*, 7 Sept. 1915. This regulation, though dated 24 August 1915, was not officially published until 30 August, appearing in the *Deutsche Lodzzer Zeitung* only on 7 September (where it was reprinted on 10 September). On the regulation, see S. Hirszhorn, 'Żydzi Królestwa Polskiego podczas wojny światowej', in I. Schiper, A. Tartakower, and A. Hafftko (eds.), *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej: Działalność społeczna, gospodarcza, oświatowa i kulturalna*, 2 vols. (Warsaw, 1932–3), i. 493–4.

¹⁹ The contradiction between this religious criterion and the terms used in other parts of the regulation, reflecting nationality, was pointed out by the regulation's opponents. *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin* (hereafter PA AA), WK, no. 14a, Bd. 7: 'Seiner Exzellenz dem Kaiserlich Deutschen General-Gouverneur General von Beseler', 25 Sept. 1915.

²⁰ CZA, A15/VIII/2c: Sobernheim to Bodenheimer, 3 Sept. 1915; CZA, Z3/140: Z.A.C. to Julius Berger, 3 Sept. 1915.

²¹ CZA, A15/VIII/9b: 'Protokoll der Unterredung der Herren Dr. Friedmann, Dr. Oppenheimer, Prof. Sobernheim, Kaplun Kogan mit dem Journalisten Herrn Feldmann und Herr Direktor Dr. Cohn am 10 Nov. 1915'.

²² PA AA, WK, no. 14a, Bd. 7: 'Seiner Exzellenz dem Kaiserlich Deutschen General-Gouverneur General von Beseler', 25 Sept. 1915.

²³ See Ignacy Steinhaus's attitude as expressed in 'Die jüdische Schulfrage in Warschau', *Jüdische Korrespondenz*, 21 Oct. 1915 (Steinhaus was a member of the Polish Club (*Kolo Polskie*) in the Austrian Imperial Council (*Reichsrat*) and the Galician Sejm); CZA, Z3/155: Ludwig Haas to the editors of

Among the Jewish national factions, Zionists, Bundists, Po'alei Tsiyon, and Territorialists opposed the regulation along the same lines as the Poles; all these groups also saw it as an attempt to Germanize the Jews.²⁴ Protesting the compulsory use of German in Jewish educational institutions, they demanded the preservation of Yiddish as the language of instruction for Jews on Polish soil.²⁵ The points they raised were practical (a lack of the technical wherewithal to change the language of instruction in the Jewish schools to Hochdeutsch, or the need to manage these schools in Yiddish during the transitional period until German could be introduced),²⁶ pedagogical ('It is ridiculous to teach in German when the Jewish children don't understand German'),²⁷ and politico-cultural ('An attempt to Germanize the Jews will lead to their Polonization, owing to the Polonization pressures of the milieu. Thus, Germany will have lost its most natural ally in eastern Europe—the Jews',²⁸ or 'When the Germans leave Poland, the Polish people will direct their anger towards the Jews, who identified themselves as Germans'²⁹). In actuality, their main demand was for the Jews to be acknowledged as a separate national group, which as such were entitled to preserve their language—Yiddish—without being subjected to either Polonization or Germanization.³⁰ Left-wing Jewish activists demonstrated publicly during September 1915 for Yiddish-language schools for the Jewish population.³¹ A petition to this effect was signed by 30,000 Jews and submitted to the German local authorities in October 1915.³²

To bypass the highly charged legal morass created by the education regulation, the Komitee für den Osten proposed the following legal tactic: Yiddish would be recognized as a dialect of German, thus enabling its use as a language of instruction in the schools. Curiously, the German occupation regime accepted this de facto solution and, consequently, Yiddish was allowed in the Jewish schools in the western area of Congress Poland, while Polish and German were to be used in schools where Polish had been the language of instruction prior to the war.³³

Jüdische Rundschau, 9 Nov. 1915. See also J. Teitelbaum, 'Haḥinukh hayehudi hatikhoni bepolin bein shetei milḥamot ha'olam, 1919–1939', Ph.D. thesis (Tel Aviv Univ., 1994), 31–2.

²⁴ 'Die Schulfrage in Lodz', *Warschauer Tageblatt*, 27 Oct. 1915; CZA, A15/VIII/9b: 'Von den Mitgliedern des Legalisierungsausschusses des Jüdischen Schul- und Volksbildungsvereins in Warschau', Dec. 1915; Kh. Kazdan, *Di geshikhte fun yidishn shulvezn in umophengikn polyn* (Mexico City, 1947), 33–4; Teitelbaum, 'Haḥinukh hayehudi hatikhoni bepolin bein shetei milḥamot ha'olam', 33; CZA, A15/VIII/8: 'Zu der zionistische Resolution über die Schulfrage'.

²⁵ 'Die jüdische Sprache — ein deutscher Volksdialekt', *Kölnische Zeitung*, 20 Sept. 1915.

²⁶ PA AA, WK, no. 11, Adh. 2, Bd. 5: KfdO to Zimmermann, 11 Oct. 1915.

²⁷ CZA, A15/VIII/9b: 'Protokoll der Sitzung des KfdO am 8. Dez. 1915'.

²⁸ PA AA, WK, no. 11, Adh. 2, Bd. 5: KfdO to Zimmermann, 11 Oct. 1915.

²⁹ CZA, A15/VIII/9b: 'Protokoll der Sitzung des KfdO am 8. Dez. 1915'.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ 'Dos lodzher leb'n—a farzamlung vegn der yidisher folks-shul', *Lodzher folksblat*, 8 Sept. 1915.

³² APKr, NKN 86: 'Sprawa szkolna w Łodzi'; Kazdan, *Di geshikhte fun yidishn shulvezn in umophengikn polyn*, 52–3; Y. Sh. Herts, *Di geshikhte fun bund in lodzh* (New York, 1958), 256.

³³ CZA, A15/VIII/2c: Kaplun Kogan to Bodenheimer, 25 Sept. 1915; CZA, A15/VIII/4: KfdO to Straus, 16 Dec. 1915. This solution suited the approach of the German occupation official in charge of

The pressure by Yiddish intelligentsia and Jewish political parties did not cease with this compromise, and these groups continued their efforts to obtain the recognition of Yiddish as the formal language of instruction in Jewish schools.³⁴ In summer 1916, with the approach of the new school year, the German authorities in Łódź relented and issued a ruling that set aside the fiction of the ‘German dialect’ and mentioned Yiddish as the language of instruction permitted in Jewish schools in the city, together with Polish and German.³⁵ The difference between the Regulation for the Organization of Schools of August 1915 and the new situation was that under the previous ruling, teaching was to be conducted in German, although in reality Yiddish was the language used, while now Yiddish was referred to explicitly as a recognized language, and as such was legally entitled to be used in schools.

This ruling was in force until September 1917, when new regulations regarding elementary school education in the Kingdom of Poland were issued. Until then, it was a source of consternation to the Poles that Yiddish was recognized as a language of instruction in the Jewish schools of Łódź, as they were making a concerted effort to accelerate the Polonization of the city’s new official Yiddishist Jewish school system.³⁶

The Question of Language and Schools in Warsaw

Warsaw, like Łódź, had a Polish majority, but the Jewish presence there was even more prominent. The percentage of Jews in Warsaw had grown from 33.4 per cent to 37.7 per cent in the period from 1882 to 1913, and in the first third of 1916, following the creation of Greater Warsaw (Wielka Warszawa), it reached 41.9 per cent. In the fifteen major neighbourhoods that comprised the municipality of Warsaw prior to the annexation of the suburbs in 1916, Jews accounted for about

Jewish affairs, Ludwig Haas. In his view, Yiddish was to be maintained as a language of instruction in schools founded after the German conquest, while the Jewish population would study in Polish in the schools where Polish was the language of instruction before the German occupation. CZA, A15/VIII/9b: ‘Protokoll der Sitzung des KfdO am 20. Dezember 1915’.

³⁴ ‘Der yudish-ovend in kontsert-zal’, *Lodzher folksblat*, 16 Mar. 1916; ‘Di farzamlung fun yudishn lerer-farayn’, *Lodzher folksblat*, 9 Apr. 1916; ‘Di grandioze farzamlung fun yidishn shul- un folks-bildung-farayn’, *Lodzher folksblat*, 29 Apr. 1916; Hertz, *Di geshikhte fun bund in lodzh*, 255–7; Kazdan, *Di geshikhte fun yidishn shulvezn in umophengikn poyln*, 54.

³⁵ ‘Be’olamenu—sefat hora’ah bevatei-hasefer belodz’, *Hatsefirah*, 10 Aug. 1916; ‘Yidish als unterrikhts shprakh’, *Varshever togblat*, 8 Aug. 1916; ‘Di yidische shprakh un di yidische shuln’, *Haynt*, 9 Aug. 1916; ‘Di unterrikhts-shprakh in yudische folks-shuln’, *Lodzher folksblat*, 10 Aug. 1916. The Yiddish schools were to be run by the municipal school board, which was composed mainly of Polish Catholics or Polonized Jews seeking to Polonize the Jewish school system despite German regulations. The Folks-Bildung Farayn tried unsuccessfully to enlist some of its members who served on the municipal commission on Jewish schools to help open Yiddish schools: ‘Di farzamlung fun yidishn shul farayn’, *Lodzher folksblat*, 9 Aug. 1916. See also M. Bałaban, ‘Raport o żydowskich instytucjach oświatowych i religijnych na terenach Królestwa Polskiego okupowanych przez Austro-Węgry’ (1916), *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, 197 (2001), 54.

³⁶ Hertz, *Łódź w czasie Wielkiej Wojny*, 163, 166–7.

44.9 per cent of the inhabitants. The prediction then (to be proved erroneous) was that in less than thirty years the city would lose its Polish majority, which was perceived in wide Polish circles as a threat. This prognosis, however, supported the autonomist demands by Jewish groups, especially the Yiddish intelligentsia.³⁷ Nevertheless, with the conquest of the city in August 1915, the Germans declared that they considered Warsaw a Polish city with no national issue whatsoever, that is, a city with no question about national minorities.³⁸

In keeping with German policy, which granted the city council administrative responsibility for education, Warsaw's municipal council made education compulsory for the city's Polish-speaking children, while at the same time deciding that school attendance would not be compulsory for Jewish children whose parents did not want them to attend Polish schools. In practice, therefore, a decision was made to create a Polish-language state educational system. Jews who wished to do so could send their children to Polish schools, but, in contrast to the policy in Łódź, no parallel Yiddish system would be established.³⁹

Following this decision, which accorded with German policy to preserve two separate educational systems for Jews and non-Jews,⁴⁰ the Warsaw city council divided the city's school-age population into two main ethnic groups: Jews and Poles-Catholics. The council, which was in charge of funding the elementary school systems of both groups, set up two school systems on a denominational basis, one Catholic and the other Jewish. However, while the council fulfilled this function dutifully with regard to Catholic children, it failed to provide an adequate Polish-language municipal elementary education system for Jews. The actual funding for the development of the Jewish schools came mainly from the Jewish community and was then transferred to the city treasury, while the Polish school system was funded entirely by the municipal treasury, by taxes from the entire population,

³⁷ Y. Leshtshinski [J. Lestschinsky], *Dos yidishe folk in tsifern* (Berlin, 1922), 42; B. Garncarska-Kadary, *Helkam shel hayehudim behitpatehut hata'asiyah shel varshah bashanim 1816/20–1914* (Tel Aviv, 1985), 75. The proportion of Jews cited by Piotr Wróbel for 1889 is 34.4%, reaching 39.2% in 1910: P. Wróbel, 'Przed odzyskaniem niepodległości', in J. Tomaszewski (ed.), *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 roku)* (Warsaw, 1993), 28–9. Although Garncarska's data are apparently more exact (owing to her sources), both point to the same tendency. This same trend emerges from Stephen Corrsin's data, notwithstanding differences in the figures. According to Corrsin, the percentage of Jews was 33.4% in 1882, 33.7% in 1897, and 38.1% in 1914. In the same period, the percentage of Poles declined from 58.1% to 55.7%, and in 1914 it was 55.2%: S. D. Corrsin, *Warsaw before the First World War: Poles and Jews in the Third City of the Russian Empire, 1880–1914* (Boulder, Colo., 1989), 145. Gabriela Zalewska proposes a datum for 1910 identical to that of Wróbel, and for 1914 identical to that of Corrsin: G. Zalewska, *Ludność żydowska w Warszawie w okresie międzywojennym* (Warsaw, 1996), 25.

³⁸ 'Warschau', *Deutsche Lodzer Zeitung*, 6 Aug. 1915.

³⁹ 'Der erste Beschluss des Warschauer Bürger-Komitees' and 'Zur Regelung der Judenfrage in Warschau', both in *Mitteilungen des polnischen Pressbüros*, 30 Aug. 1915. On the implementation of the obligatory education system in Łódź, see Hertz, *Łódź w czasie Wielkiej Wojny*, 164–6.

⁴⁰ Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Warsaw, Niem. Władze okupacyjne na terenie byłego królestw. Pol., 17: 'Rozmowa Cleinowa z przedstawicielem prasy warszawskiej', 11 Aug. 1915.

Polish and Jewish alike. The city council thus systematically discriminated against the Jewish schools operating in Polish under its supervision and with the encouragement of the municipality.⁴¹

Immediately after the decision regarding compulsory education, a meeting was called by the Yidisher Lerer Farayn (Association of Jewish/Yiddish Teachers) in Warsaw to demand official Yiddish schools for Yiddish-speaking Warsaw Jews, in light of the relative success of the efforts made in Łódź. Yiddishists, Hebraists, Zionists, and Bundists banded together to insist on mandatory education for all children and for the recognition of Yiddish as an official language in the Jewish schools.⁴² As in the case of Łódź, a petition was drawn up, and was signed by 32,645 people.⁴³

In contrast to Łódź, however, and at the very same time, the German authorities did not respond favourably to this request and would not give Yiddish even *de facto* recognition as a language of instruction in the education system that was being established. The German authorities did not intervene in these issues in Warsaw, although in Łódź they were involved on a routine basis. At the same time, however, a liberal education policy introduced by the Germans led to unprecedented developments in *private* modern Jewish education for the secular and religious sectors, mainly in Yiddish.⁴⁴

A Dual Policy

A dual policy thus emerged, in which distinctions were made between various regions. As explained by a leading member of the Komitee für den Osten, Adolf

⁴¹ 'Di letste tsvey zitsungen in shtot-rat', *Varshever togblat*, 13 Aug. 1916; 'Fun der shabesdiker zitsung in shtot-rat', *Varshever togblat*, 14 Aug. 1916; 'Di Nowa Gazeta vegn di rekht fun yidish', *Haynt*, 15 Aug. 1916; 'Nowa Gazeta vegn a yidishe shule', *Varshever togblat*, 15 Aug. 1916. Polish progressive circles claimed that the municipal treasury should maintain the educational system in its totality and in an equitable way, including the Jewish system, on condition that the schools be supervised by the municipality and that the language of instruction be Polish. They did not, however, support the demand for Yiddish schooling. 'Zitsungen fun shtot rat, donershtik un fraytik', *Haynt*, 13 Aug. 1916. These progressive circles were unable to enforce equal treatment of both school systems, and the city council continued to discriminate systematically against the Jewish education system in Polish. See 'Yeshivat-mo'etsset ha'ir', *Hatsefirah*, 5 Nov. 1916; 'Devar-mah', *Hatsefirah*, 8 Sept. 1916; N. Prilutski [Prylucki], *Redes in varshever shtotrat* (Warsaw, 1922), 7–8.

⁴² 'Di yidishe shulfrage in varshe', *Haynt*, 26 Aug. 1915; the article describes the meeting. It was widely quoted in the official local German press and in the semi-official Yiddish press in Łódź: 'Die jüdische Schulfrage in Warschau', *Deutsche Warschauer Zeitung*, 29 Aug. 1915; 'Di yidishe shulfrage in varshe', *Lodzher folksblat*, 27 Aug. 1915. The publication of such information in the official and semi-official press demonstrated the importance of the event to the authorities. See also Kazdan, *Di geshikhte fun yidishn shulvezn in umophengikn poyln*, 26–8; K. Weiser, *Jewish People, Yiddish Nation: Noah Prylucki and the Folkists in Poland* (Toronto, 2011), 127–39.

⁴³ Kazdan, *Di geshikhte fun yidishn shulvezn in umophengikn poyln*, 33–6; Weiser, *Jewish People, Yiddish Nation*, 137–9, 219–20.

⁴⁴ Kazdan, *Di geshikhte fun yidishn shulvezn in umophengikn poyln*, 13–43, 52–3; K. Weiser, 'German Policy and the Struggle for Yiddish Secular Schools in Congress Poland during the First World War', *Yiddish Studies Master's Essay* (Columbia Univ., 1996).

Friedemann, during one of his many trips to the German occupation zones, the differing policies regarding linguistic and education issues derived from ‘political considerations regarding the future shaping of the occupied territories’.⁴⁵ In his view, the status of the Yiddish vernacular was treated as a political issue, with German authorities using the language question as a means of promoting geopolitical aims. Their policies reflected the broader plans and ongoing disputes within the German leadership regarding the future of the various regions.

Germany planned to rule over extensive areas in Poland. One region which was intended for annexation to Germany or for indirect German rule consisted of incompletely defined territories in the western and northern areas of Congress Poland (the *Grenzstreifen* or border strip). A substantial number of Germans already inhabited these regions, or would be brought there, although Germany sought to emphasize the multinational nature of the area.⁴⁶ The recognition of Yiddish in these areas signified the legal acceptance of the Jewish population as a separate ethnic group parallel to the Polish nationals and the German minority. By emphasizing a triad of languages and ethno-national equivalent groups living in defined boundaries, the German regime sought to de-Polonize Łódź and promote German rule in the region, either directly—by annexing the area (with or without its residents) to Germany—or by preserving it as a colonial or semi-colonial territory.⁴⁷ These measures helped put Greater Łódź, and a western belt of Congress Poland, under the aegis of the Reich without necessarily including the region’s non-German population. The recognition of Yiddish in Łódź aimed to delegitimize (and then weaken) its attachment to any Polish political entity likely to arise.

The Jewish minority, and its demand for recognition of the Yiddish vernacular, was vulnerable to this kind of manipulation because its political claims mainly concerned cultural aspects and did not question the German aims of control and hegemony. Even the Jewish demand for national autonomy on a personal basis (or for some kind of minority rights) was not perceived as a threat to German dominance. Highlighting the lack of dominance by any one nationality worked in favour of German plans to gain indirect control over this area.

Still, the fate of Łódź was not completely clear in Germany’s post-war schemes.⁴⁸ In German thinking, if the city were to be transferred to Poland, then retaining the Jewish population’s existing vernacular would be better than to

⁴⁵ CZA, A15/VIII/2f: ‘Bericht über die Reise Dr. Friedemann und Dr. Max Cohn zum Oberkommando Ost in der Zeit vom 8. bis 13. Mai 1916’.

⁴⁶ On the German plans for colonization and Germanization, see Basler, *Deutschlands Annexionspolitik*, 51–74, 385; Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*, 78–106, 160–3.

⁴⁷ On the annexationist tendencies of the German Reich towards Poland, see Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen*. The German-speaking population in Łódź petitioned for the annexation of western parts of Congress Poland (including the city of Łódź) to Germany. See Z. Kulak, ‘Memorandum of the Germans from Łódź Concerning the Annexation of Polish Territories to the Reich at the Time of World War I’, *Polish Western Affairs*, 7 (1966), 388–403.

⁴⁸ Sukiennicki, *East Central Europe during World War I*, 146.

Germanize them, since the Germanization of the Jewish population, in such a case, would expose Germany to an unwanted stream of Jewish refugees. A cohesive local Jewish element, moreover, would balance out the Polish element and become 'a German control base'. In short, allowing the various ethnic groups to maintain their own vernacular supported the lack of dominance by any one nationality, and thereby undercut different claims for sovereignty over these areas and favoured German plans for indirect control.

If in the Łódź area the German regime favoured recognition of the Jewish national minority and their language, in the Warsaw area, and in central and eastern Congress Poland generally, German authorities used the language issue to lend support to the Polish character of the country. In these cases, they were willing to accept some of the demands by the Polish national movement for a Polish entity with its own language and culture, and thereby to recruit the movement to the German side in the overall German military effort. In Warsaw and central Congress Poland, therefore, the Germans found it expedient to disappoint the Jewish hope for autonomy in a Poland that would accept its linguistic and ethnic complexities, thereby undermining the Jewish minority's defence mechanisms.

The recognition or non-recognition of Yiddish was a tool for the German authorities, which they could use to show preference for one or another element of the population to suit their plans. The various means they employed to control, supervise, and redistribute the resource of the mother tongue as cultural capital point to the importance the Germans attached to this arena. Control over the use of the different vernaculars allowed them to shape the cultural world of the societies under their occupation, enabling them either to preserve or to change the social order according to their political plans. Moulding the educational system was a powerful means for achieving political purposes—a means whose importance was understood by the Germans, Poles, and Jews alike.

POLICY UNDER THE NEW POLISH ADMINISTRATION

The Provisional Council of State and the Recognition of the Vernaculars in the Municipal Domain

German political policy in the occupied territories shifted radically in 1916 to the goal of establishing buffer zones/authorities, or buffer states with limited sovereignty, between Russia and Germany. Towards the end of the year, this was translated into the formation of an independent German satellite state in Poland and the transfer of administrative responsibilities to newly established Polish governmental bodies. The first such framework was the Provisional Council of State (*Tymczasowa Rada Stanu*; TRS).⁴⁹

One of the first issues to be discussed in the executive branch of the Provisional Council of State was the language question in Łódź.⁵⁰ The German authorities

⁴⁹ W. Suleja, *Tymczasowa Rada Stanu* (Warsaw, 1998), 11–49.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 159–60.

wanted to institutionalize the formal use of German in the municipal institutions, side by side with the Polish language, but the newly elected Polish city councillors were threatening to boycott the city council if it acknowledged both languages. In light of this, special deliberations were held to debate the status of both languages.⁵¹ Because of the importance of the issue a special representative of the German occupiers attended the discussion besides the permanent representative of the German occupation regime. The regime drafted an ordinance recognizing the use of the German language in the municipality and in the city council.⁵² Most members of the Provisional Council opposed recognizing German as an official language, despite the strong presence of the German language in the municipal space of Łódź since the German occupation, and in fact *because* of such a presence and even in spite of pressure from the German representatives during the discussion. Some arguments against such recognition reflected opposition to the German occupation's dictate.⁵³ Many others reflected fears that such recognition would reduce the legitimacy of the Polish state in formation in the perception of the Polish-speaking people ('making huge concessions to the German language would make a fatal impression in the country').⁵⁴ A special commission redrafted the ordinance, limiting the use of the German language in the city council, making it more acceptable: 'Initially equal permission was granted to the German and Polish languages; today we would not give such permission.'⁵⁵ But the very recognition of the German language provoked strong objections.

The argument presented by the prelate Fr. Henryk Przeździecki, a popular representative from Łódź, took the discussion a step further. He addressed the socio-economic consequences of recognizing any language other than Polish as official, arguing that to recognize German would transform bilingualism into a functional asset, which would simultaneously be disadvantageous to monolingual civil servants. He pointed to the possible dismissal of Polish-speaking civil servants who did not know German. To prevent putting ethnic or monolingual Poles at a disadvantage in the nascent state apparatus and endangering their position in the emerging bureaucracy, he opposed recognition of the German language. In this respect, he stated: 'We cannot accept any exception.'⁵⁶ Negating the recognition of the German language was thus a means to ensure the position of the monolingual Polish civil servants vis-à-vis the German-speaking municipal bureaucracy. Przeździecki's proposed amendment intended to exclude German, the language recognized in the rephrased ordinance, in order to regulate the implementation of an ethnically biased labour market policy. In this context, Przeździecki was the first discussant to point out that the denial of the *Sprachenrecht* of the minorities implied the exclusion of minorities from the resource of recognition of a societal language, thereby hampering minority groups in terms of recruitment to the public civil

⁵¹ Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw (hereafter AAN), TRS, Akt 7, Sprawy Samorządowe, 16 Feb. 1917.

⁵² Ibid., 23 Feb. 1917; 5 Mar. 1917.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 23 Feb. 1917.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 5 Mar. 1917.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

service and the concomitant social mobility. In fact, his proposition was consistent with discriminatory practices in employment as implemented in municipal institutions in Warsaw and other cities in Congress Poland where non-ethnic Poles (especially Jews) were discriminated against.⁵⁷

The argument presented by Przeździecki spoke about German, but its subtext addressed Yiddish. This is clear from the response of Władysław Studnicki, a member of the Club of Polish State Partisans (Klub Państwowców Polskich)—a right-wing, pro-German political organization. He presented a very different perspective from that of Przeździecki. He claimed that the rephrased ordinance should mention non-dominant languages used in Łódź and in other cities in Congress Poland, in particular Yiddish. Studnicki argued:

The common use of the jargon [Yiddish] could be useful when passing rules that apply to the population as a whole, as for instance regarding health or hygiene. In their [own] country, the Poles can be liberals because they are the landlords and their Polish language is the official language. The use of the languages that the minorities know must be allowed in the official institutions. When needed, it [the information] will be translated in both directions, into the official and into the secondary languages.⁵⁸

Basically, Studnicki's position reflected a perceived need to facilitate communication between the bureaucratic apparatus and the individuals addressing it. His answer to Przeździecki essentially claimed that the other side of the exclusion of the languages of minorities would imply the waiver of council authority over these minorities. In other words, besides the ostensible pay-off from the rejection of the minority languages—i.e. reinforcement of the position of monolingual Polish civil servants—there would be a loss of authority over the minorities.

Studnicki's approach, however, was thoroughly rejected in formalistic and legalistic arguments which demanded the exclusive recognition of Polish in municipal institutions. Ludomir Grendyszyński, a leader of the National Work Group (Grupa Pracy Narodowej), contended that 'the jargon is unacknowledged and lacking any rights', and thus it should not be mentioned in the regulations.⁵⁹ Another influential member of the council, Franciszek Radziwiłł, asserted that it was 'absolutely necessary to eliminate bilingualism [Polish and German] in order to avoid any kind of precedent',⁶⁰ that is, the acknowledgement of Yiddish, which, linked so closely with the German-language question, would mean its recognition as a societal language and culture. The majority of the members of the council viewed the recognition of both the German and Yiddish languages as illegitimate, as undermining the building of a Polish state, and as endangering civil solidarity.

Nevertheless, the political circumstances dictated a compromise. Despite pressure from the German authorities, the decision was made in March 1917 that the

⁵⁷ Prilutski, *Redes*, 40–2; V. Shulman, 'In di yorn fun der ershter velt-milkhome', in *Di yidn in poyln fun di eltste tsaytn biz der tsveyter velt-milkhome* (New York, 1946), 875; Zieliński, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, 279, 285–6.

⁵⁸ AAN, TRS, Akt 7, Sprawy Samorządowe, 5 Mar. 1917.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

official language of the municipality and the city council of Łódź, as of other such bodies, would be Polish. However, as a concession to the pressure, a stipulation was added to the effect that in some cases the Łódź municipality would have the right to use German (only German; no mention was made of Yiddish) or to attach a German translation to correspondence with German authorities.⁶¹ The members of the Polish faction in the Łódź city council did not accept this compromise and proposed to limit it as much as possible, 'with the goal of assuring the Polish character of the city's administration'.⁶² They were particularly concerned with the highest positions in the city.⁶³ This statement amounted to the adoption of Przeździecki's point of view and reflected a desire to exclude minorities from the administrative apparatus.

The question of the status of the Yiddish vernacular arose again in July 1917 when the Provisional Council of State discussed proposed regulations for the district government drawn up by the Austrian occupation regime.⁶⁴ Regarding the language question, the Austrian proposal suggested a similar arrangement for Poland as for Galicia, recognizing the Polish language as official and providing minority rights to the German and Ukrainian languages. Ukrainian, which was widespread in eastern Galicia, was also relevant in the Austrian-occupied region of Congress Poland because of the large number of Ukrainians who lived there, primarily in the peripheral areas and especially in the Chełm region.⁶⁵

In view of this, Studnicki, in accordance with his previously cited statement, argued that 'the rights of the minorities should be taken into consideration . . . in spite of the awareness that this contradicts the views of the executive of the Provisional Council of State'. The general attitude towards the rights of the minority languages was relatively open and tolerant during this debate. Jerzy Jampolski, a representative of the Austrian zone of occupation, emphasized that the provision in the proposed regulation allowing the possibility of permitting requests to the authorities and responses to them to be written in German and Ukrainian, as was the case in Galicia, was 'the minimal concession towards these national minorities'. Przeździecki stated that he was 'in favour of granting national-minority rights even

⁶¹ Hertz, *Łódź w czasie Wielkiej Wojny*, 166–7; Suleja, *Tymczasowa Rada Stanu*, 160; W. Suleja, *Próba budowy zrębów polskiej państwowości w okresie instnienia Tymczasowej Rady Stanu* (Wrocław, 1981), 324.

⁶² AAN, TRS, Akt 7, Sprawy Samorządowe, 27 Mar. 1917.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ For a general description of the discussion concerning the regulations for the district government drawn up by the Austrian occupation regime, see Suleja, *Tymczasowa Rada Stanu*, 162–3. Surprisingly, Suleja did not develop in this monograph the language question which arose during such discussion.

⁶⁵ By the first decade of the twentieth century there was an increasing acceptance of the idea of a literary Ukrainian language based mainly on the Poltava region of Dnieper Ukraine but that also contained elements of east Galician vernacular, especially in its scientific and administrative vocabulary. 'Ruthenisch' ('Ruthenian') was the term officially used in Austria to refer to it. On the Ukrainian language question in the nineteenth century, see P. Magocsi, 'The Language Question as a Factor in the National Movement in Eastern Galicia', in A. S. Markovits and F. E. Sysyn (eds.), *Nationbuilding and the Politics of Nationalism: Essays on Austrian Galicia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 220–38.

to 1 per cent of the population'. Stanisław Bukowiecki, another member of the Provisional Council, the director of the Department of Justice known for his view that there was a need to train a cadre of Polish officials, pointed out: 'It is natural that [different people] address the authorities in different languages. Actually, two petitions were made in the Czech language and they were accepted.' Jerzy Jam-polski added: 'The petitions made in Czech or English [were accepted] as a matter of courtesy, but, after all, what is important is tolerance towards the minority languages.'⁶⁶

Nevertheless, when it came to translating theoretical rights into practical regulations, the tone changed and other aspects were also considered. The first point of dispute revolved around the territorial scope of the rights of minority languages. Should a minority language's rights encompass the country as a whole or only certain districts? On the one hand, representatives of the Austrian-occupied region of Congress Poland supported the adoption of the Galician regulations at the territorial level. Ignacy Rosner, a leading figure in the Austro-Polish conservative group and a representative of the Austrian occupation regime, stated somewhat aggressively that 'from the political point of view it would be harmful if the Council of State were to remove precisely this point from the proposal', adding that 'the assurance of minority rights is a certain type of guarantee submitted to foreign nations by the Polish state'. Moreover, he doubted whether the acknowledgement of such rights at the district level only would be advantageous: 'If in Galicia freedom to take decisions in this issue had been given to the district authorities, the Ruthenian language would never have been recognized . . . In Congress Poland the situation would not be different.'⁶⁷ Józef Mikułowski-Pomorski added to this the argument that 'this question should be uniformly resolved for all the national minorities in Poland . . . not leaving vast freedom to the executive'.⁶⁸

Against these views, on the other hand, most participants supported a regional approach to the language question, considering that the recognition of minority languages should be granted only at the district level. The different ethnic composition in each district, they claimed, dictated a different approach in each district. Discussions about the Ukrainian language, for instance, now centred on the question of how many Ukrainians there were and where they were to be found, as their numbers had fallen as a result of migration from the eastern periphery of Congress Poland to Russia in the wake of the ravages of the war. In this respect Bukowiecki stated that the recognition of the Ukrainian language should be very limited territorially, since 'after all the number of Ukrainians in the Lublin district is scanty'.⁶⁹

A large proportion of the council members vigorously opposed recognizing the German language on the grounds that 'there are no Germans as a national minority in the Austrian occupation zone . . . [but only] in the German occupation zone.

⁶⁶ All quotations in this paragraph are from AAN, TRS, Akt 7, Sprawy Samorządowe, 7 July 1917.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Ukrainian was officially referred to as 'Ruthenian' in Austria: see n. 65 above.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

[Therefore, the German language] should be discussed [only] when regulating the district government in the German occupation zone.' Nevertheless, the council members were aware that they could hardly avoid recognizing the German language in the Polish territory as a whole. Jampolski supported the proposal made by the Department of the Interior of the Provisional Council of State to 'leave the recognition of other languages to the district authorities'. Thus, for instance, 'if in a certain district there is a large percentage of Germans, the district authorities will certainly permit the presenting of petitions in that language'.⁷⁰ This position was broadly accepted.

To help persuade the council to adopt a positive policy towards minority languages, Ignacy Rosner, a strong advocate of the Austro-Polish solution, emphasized that 'the Polish borders are not yet determined, so [the recognition of minority languages] is a political issue, and since the Polish people are interested in a Poland [constituted] not only in its ethnographic borders . . . the affirmation of minority rights constitutes a kind of guarantee to foreign nationals in the name of the Polish state'.⁷¹

As a compromise, some council members suggested not naming the minority languages specifically, or even not raising the issue at all. Responding to this proposal, both Stefan Iszkowski and Jampolski expressed the opinion that

From the viewpoint of the interests of Poland, the two languages that should be permitted, i.e. Ruthenian and German, must be explicitly recognized, because only in this way will it be possible to prevent the use of the jargon, since it is, after all, impossible to claim in the regulation that the jargon is not a language. If we claim this is the case, we will have unending conflicts on theoretical grounds over the question of whether or not the jargon is a language.

But the mention of the languages to be recognized, as well as the omission of 'the jargon', should be done in a subtle way, because 'The most important side of the question is the political aspect, it is about the impact on foreign countries. After all, this will be the first time that the Council of State takes a stand on the rights of the national minorities; it should therefore speak out tolerantly'.⁷² In other words, in implementing a policy regarding minority languages, the question of the Jewish vernacular, Yiddish, had to be taken into account, above all because of its international implications.

Following Iszkowski's and Jampolski's suggestions, Grendyszyński and Antoni Kaczorowski proposed to add to the German and Ukrainian languages two further languages: Belarusian and Lithuanian. 'In this way', the argument went on, 'we will prevent the jargon question from being raised.' As was the case with Ukrainian, a language used in the agrarian eastern periphery, so Lithuanian and Belarusian would be limited to specific and delimited districts, geographically peripheral. 'It is not possible that in Lublin, for example, a petition be submitted in Lithuanian or be answered in Lithuanian, as we cannot require that officials all over the country

⁷⁰ Ibid.⁷¹ Ibid.⁷² Ibid.

know Lithuanian.’ A similar argument excluded any minority language from other big cities, since, ‘for instance, in the statute of the capital city of Warsaw it is stated that the only official language is Polish’.⁷³

The logic of denying the language rights of a non-dominant language in a city which did not have members of the population which spoke that language underscored the political aim of such denial in the case of the broad presence of speakers of a non-dominant language, Yiddish in this case, in the same geographical area. In this case, citing the languages permitted was clearly a strategy for rejecting the recognition of the Yiddish vernacular. This subtle manner of rejection was soon to be repeated.

The Provisional Council of State and the Recognition of Vernacular Languages in the School System

The language question arose again in the Department of Religions and Public Education (Departament Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego) in a discussion of the proposal by the Austrian occupation authorities regarding the education of the Jewish population.⁷⁴ The status of the *heders* and the issue of language of instruction was a main topic in these deliberations. Józef Mikułowski-Pomorski, who headed the department, argued that the *heders* should not be recognized as state schools, since Yiddish was their sole language of instruction.⁷⁵ The use of the Polish language in Jewish educational institutions, he maintained, should be the criterion for granting them recognition as state institutions. By contrast, Studnicki, consistent with his statements on the issue of minority languages, came out in favour of granting state status to the *heders*, even if the children were taught in Yiddish, though his position was, as in the past, exceptional among the members of the Provisional Council. He contended that ‘since the Jews constitute a large percentage of the population, their schools should be viewed as public schools’.⁷⁶ In areas with sizeable Jewish populations, he argued, Jews should be allowed to open Yiddish-language schools in which Polish would also be taught, along with

⁷³ AAN, TRS, Akt 7, Sprawy Samorządowe, 7 July 1917

⁷⁴ Suleja, *Próba budowy zrębów polskiej państwowości*, 334. The Austrian authorities’ proposal was based on a memorandum prepared by Mayer Bałaban, the consultant for Jewish issues in the Austrian occupation zone. On Bałaban’s political activity during the war and its implications, see M. Silber, ‘Me’ir balaban ufe’iluto hatsiburit-politit bepolin biyemei milhemet ha’olam harishonah’, *Shevut*, NS, 11 (27) (2002–3), 139–58. The memorandum was published by Frank Schuster, who wrote an interesting introduction to it. See F. Schuster, ‘“Lepiej jest wykonać w jednej części Polski całą pracę niż w całej Polsce połowę lub wcale”’: Uwagi dotyczące sprawozdania prof. dr. Majera Bałabana o wizycie w polskich gminach żydowskich w czasie I wojny światowej’, *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, 197 (2001), 27–34; Bałaban, ‘Raport o żydowskich instytucjach oświatowych i religijnych’, *ibid.* 35–68.

⁷⁵ AAN, TRS, Sprawy Oświaty, Akt 11: Posiedzenia Wydziału Wykonawczego w d. 7.VII.17.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* It seems that Studnicki’s position was not exceptional among supporters of the Polish–German solution. Adam Ronikier’s letter to Paul Nathan is a partial reflection of such a position: P. Nathan, ‘Fortschritte in Polen’, *Berliner Tageblatt*, 5 Apr. 1917.

Polish history and geography.⁷⁷ In his view, the language of instruction in the school was not decisive for moulding loyal citizens of the Polish state. One could be a useful citizen of the Polish state without having a thorough command of the Polish language, or even without knowing it at all, he claimed, just as one could be fluent in Polish, yet be a harmful citizen of the Polish state.⁷⁸ These arguments, however, fell on deaf ears.

The Provisional Council discussed political guidelines not only for *heders* and other schooling for Jewish children, but for the educational institutions of other minorities as well.⁷⁹ Clearly, the members of the council were aware that recognizing the language of a minority group did not necessarily have an adverse effect on the status of the language they sought to promote—Polish—as is reflected in the rationale given for this policy decision:

In principle, the language of instruction in public schools shall be Polish. However, in exceptional cases, permission will be granted for teaching in Lithuanian, Ruthenian, and German. The communities must submit requests [in this regard], and the Department of Religions and Public Education must authorize them. Public and private schools with instruction conducted in languages other than Polish will be required to provide both oral and written instruction in the Polish language.⁸⁰

This resolution was passed at the same time as the decisions regarding the *heders*, indicating the close connection between them. Notably, the decision regarding recognition of the minority languages used the same tactic of citing the recognized minority languages (Lithuanian, Ukrainian, and German) in order to avoid the question of Yiddish and to ignore the Yiddish vernacular.

The Transfer of the School System and the Question of Yiddish

While the protracted and exhaustive deliberations in the Department of Religions and Public Education over the education of the Jewish population were part and parcel of the discussions on education for national minorities, the Jewish issue was the last, and unresolved, topic in the negotiations between the German occupation authorities and the Provisional Council. The purpose of these discussions was to bring about an orderly transfer of administrative responsibility for the school system in Congress Poland from the occupiers to the council. The discussions on

⁷⁷ AAN, TRS, Sprawy Oświaty, Akt 11: Posiedzenia Wydziału Wykonawczego w d. 7.VII.17.

⁷⁸ 'Diskusyes vegn di yidn-frage', *Haynt*, 30 Apr. 1917. Studnicki's party adopted a resolution in accordance with his opinion: 'The evolution of all the cultures and nationalities that populate the Polish state will be guaranteed. All public positions and public posts will be open to all the citizens of the state without differentiation by religion or origin. The languages of the national minorities will be considered in the schools, in the administration, and in the courts.' 'Di poylishe parteyen un zeyer batsiyung tsu di natsyionale minderhaytn', *Haynt*, 9 Nov. 1917. Although Studnicki was supported by the German authorities, who exerted pressure on his behalf in the new state apparatus, his influence in the Provisional Council was minimal.

⁷⁹ AAN, TRS, Sprawy Oświaty, Akt 11: Posiedzenia Wydziału Wykonawczego w d. 17.IV.17.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

this matter went on for months, until September 1917.⁸¹ The primary reason for the slow progress was the attempt by the German occupation officials to compel the Polish authorities to agree to an arrangement that was unacceptable to them. The sticking point concerned the division of responsibility between the Polish authorities and the minority schools, with the issue of education for the Jewish minority constituting a major stumbling block.⁸²

The Provisional Council of State repeatedly threatened to resign over the German authorities' attempts to compel its members to agree to arrangements they considered unacceptable, namely the German insistence on the establishment of country-wide systems of non-Polish schools. Further, the Germans demanded that these national school networks have the authority to tax the populations they served and that these populations not be subject to double taxation. Alternatively, they proposed that the Polish government could subsidize these schools by means of a national subsidy that would reflect the relative proportion of minority students attending their respective schools.⁸³ According to the German proposal, the authority of the state over these networks would be only supervisory. The German occupation forces were thus supporting the establishment of a system of national educational autonomy for all the national minorities living in Polish lands.⁸⁴ Extensive propaganda efforts were made within the German national minority to encourage them to set up their own school systems, thereby confronting the Provisional Council with a *fait accompli*. The council, however, categorically opposed both demands—to establish minority school networks and to subsidize them proportionally ('It will create a state within a state').⁸⁵

A month before the German occupation regime was to turn over responsibility for educational matters to the Polish authorities, two issues still remained unresolved: the problem of Jewish education, and the question of financial support and responsibility for supervision of the minority schools. While the German proposition's draft had already acknowledged Jews as a religious minority (a move that accorded with the wishes of the Polish authorities), the German proposal clearly put the rights of religious minorities (read: Jews) and national minorities (a clear reference to the German minority, which the occupation authorities were attempting to safeguard) on an equal plane. According to the German plan, these two categories were entitled to the same measures of security, supervision, and

⁸¹ Suleja, *Tymczasowa Rada Stanu*, 171.

⁸² M. Handelsman, 'Les Efforts de la Pologne pour la reconstruction d'un état indépendant', in id. (ed.), *La Pologne: Sa vie économique et sociale pendant la guerre* (Paris, 1933), 179–80; AAN, TRS, Sprawy Oświaty, Akt 11: Posiedzenia Wydziału Wykonawczego w d. 21.VII.17.

⁸³ AAN, TRS, Sprawy Oświaty, Akt 11: Posiedzenia Wydziału Wykonawczego w d. 16.VIII.17; CZA, A8/37/3: 'Bericht der Reise der Herren Dr. Adolf Friedmann, Dr. Franz Oppenheimer und Prof. Sobernheim nach dem östlichen Okkupationsgebiet im April/Mai 1917'.

⁸⁴ Handelsman, 'Les Efforts de la Pologne pour la reconstruction d'un état indépendant', 179–80; AAN, TRS, Sprawy Oświaty, Akt 11: Posiedzenia Wydziału Wykonawczego w d. 21.VII.17.

⁸⁵ AAN, TRS, Sprawy Oświaty, Akt 11: Posiedzenia Wydziału Wykonawczego w d. 16.VIII.17.

subsidy, whether their essential make-up was religious or national. The Polish proposal, by contrast, was clearly the outcome of a concerted effort to drive a wedge between these categories, giving priority to the national minorities (the code terminology denoting the German minority) over the religious minorities (i.e. Jews).⁸⁶

The firm stand of the Provisional Council resulted in a compromise by the German authorities,⁸⁷ enabling the finalization of a regulation, drawn up on 12 September 1917, to transfer all responsibility for education to the Polish authorities.⁸⁸ The fundamental nature of the compromise was to create a distinction between the two types of minorities—national and religious—with a bias against the religious minority (essentially, the Jews) in comparison with the national minority (essentially, the Germans), who were given more rights. The occupation authorities agreed that private high schools would not receive state subsidies. The Polish negotiators, for their part, agreed to the creation of a system of officially recognized German elementary schools on a denominational basis (Protestant and Catholic). The two networks—one Protestant and the other Catholic—responsible for these schools would jointly present the budgetary requests of the German education network, and would be given government subsidies.⁸⁹

Thus, official recognition for the Yiddish vernacular was sacrificed on the altar of a political compromise. The final regulation declared that Jews were solely a religious minority and that the state would establish parallel classes for Jews within Polish schools or in parallel schools where the day of rest would be Saturday. The *heders* and *talmudei torah* were to be recognized as *private* institutions that would be required to provide a general elementary education in the Polish language. Public funding (by the local councils and municipalities) was to be provided for the classes taught in Polish. Notably, the stipulation concerning even this limited funding was included in the regulation only because of pressure from the German authorities, who insisted on it.⁹⁰

Since the regulations formally stipulated that in the *heders* and *talmudei torah* general subjects (including, of course, the Polish language) would be taught in Polish, and that these institutions would receive subsidies, it followed that Jewish

⁸⁶ CZA, Z3/146: 'Warschau den 17. August 1917—Entwurf der Schulabteilung—Entwurf des Direktors des Departements für Kultus und Unterricht—Gesetz über Berücksichtigung von Schulbedürfnissen der Minderheiten im Königreich Polen'. See esp. clauses 6–8.

⁸⁷ AAN, TRS, Sprawy Oświaty, Akt 11: Posiedzenia Wydziału Wykonawczego w d. 25.VIII.17.

⁸⁸ Suleja, *Tymczasowa Rada Stanu*, 172.

⁸⁹ Handelsman, 'Les Efforts de la Pologne pour la reconstruction d'un état indépendant', 180; K. Krasowski, *Związki wyznaniowe w II Rzeczypospolitej: Studium historycznoprawne* (Warsaw, 1988), 208, 210.

⁹⁰ AAN, TRS, Sprawy Oświaty, Akt 11: Posiedzenia Wydziału Wykonawczego w d. 25.VIII.17. Compare Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie, Ces. Niemiecki Urząd Powiatowy w Łukowie, 200: 'Verordnungsblatt für das Generalgouvernement Warschau', 20 Sept. 1917, with CZA, Z3/146: 'Gespräch mit Herrn Vizekronmarschall v. Pomorski, über den Schutz der jüdischen Minderheit', 14 Sept. 1917; and see 'Das neue Stadium', *Jüdische Rundschau*, 19 Nov. 1917, p. 41; E. Zechlin, *Die deutsche Politik und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen, 1969), 210.

children would study other subjects in another language. Naturally, that other language would be the vernacular spoken by the Jews—Yiddish. However, naming the language was avoided. Everyone in the council knew that Yiddish, the jargon, existed, and that it was vibrant and vital, but they refrained from mentioning its very existence for fear that in so doing they might be handing it formal, if only indirect, recognition. Moreover, the limited funding for the Jewish schools was to be allocated only ‘so long as the children of the Mosaic faith are unable to attend state elementary schools’, and so long as instruction in the general subjects ‘shall be carried out according to the general [state] curriculum and under general [state] supervision’.⁹¹ These regulations created an absolute separation between the two types of minorities and discriminated against the religious minority in comparison with the national minority, with the latter having more rights.

Strikingly, no reference was made to the relatively liberal educational policies introduced by the Germans in Warsaw, Łódź, and other provincial cities, which had led to unprecedented developments in modern Jewish education for the secular, religious, and ultra-Orthodox sectors, conducted mainly in Yiddish, and on a much smaller scale in Hebrew. With the transfer of control of the education system to the Polish authorities in September 1917, the Jewish population was free to develop its own educational system, but all education in Yiddish from then on was viewed as private. The Polish authorities systematically refrained from granting this network any public or state-related status, repeatedly stressing its status as a private system.⁹² In September 1917, Yiddish was completely divested of any official connection to the state. Ironically, the Polish authorities now adopted the educational approach developed by the German occupation authorities in Warsaw during 1915–17, and extended it to the entire country which had refused to recognize Yiddish. For their part, the German authorities now sought to protect Yiddish, offering to the Jewish school system a status similar to that which was created for the German minority.

Finally, the Provisional Council guaranteed substantial cultural rights to the minorities in central Poland. The German occupation was thus effective in consolidating German educational institutions. German schools throughout the Government General of Warsaw grew at a brisk pace. By 1918 the number of German elementary schools reached its peak.⁹³ However, the policy of the new Polish authorities regarding Belarusian and Ukrainian schools was different. While the German occupation opened schools for them, from 1918 the Polish authorities did not act to develop them. Quite the opposite: in 1919 the new Polish authorities actually closed them.⁹⁴ The Polish authorities did not develop schooling for Jewish

⁹¹ AAN, TRS, Sprawy Oświaty, Akt 11: Posiedzenia Wydziału Wykonawczego w d. 25. VIII. 17.

⁹² Kazdan, *Di geshikhte fun yidishn shulvezn in umophengikn polyn*, 13–43, 52–3; CZA, Z3/146: ‘Gespräch mit Herrn Vizekronmarschall v. Pomorski, über den Schutz der jüdischen Minderheit’, 14 Sept. 1917.

⁹³ W. Chu, *The German Minority in Interwar Poland* (Cambridge, 2012), 122.

⁹⁴ K. Srokowski, *Sprawa narodowościowa na kresach wschodnich* (Kraków, 1924), 11; W. Paprocka,

children even in Polish. Jewish representatives in Warsaw complained to Warsaw city council in 1918 of a biased allocation of resources and budgeting. The number of places allocated to Jewish children in municipal schools was low and did not reach the minimal demands of the Jewish population.⁹⁵ These complaints were made to the city council since according to the regulations the municipality was responsible for providing such places.

BACK TO THEORY: YIDDISH AND OTHER VERNACULARS, A SOCIAL INTERPRETATION OF LINGUISTIC RECOGNITION

The official recognition or non-recognition of Yiddish was used as a tool by both the German and the Polish authorities to show preference towards one or other element of the population with the aim of achieving their political objectives. The various means of controlling and supervising the educational system employed by the administration point to the great importance attached to this arena. Control over education allowed the authorities to shape the cultural milieu of society and preserve or change the social order in accordance with their political goals. Thus, the shaping of the educational system was a powerful means for achieving political purposes. In effect, the Germans, Poles, and Jews all understood the importance of this arena and each attempted to exploit it.

Clearly, this is precisely what Germany did in the areas it conquered and administered as Ober Ost. The German occupation regulation of 24 August 1915 gave de facto recognition and de facto autonomy to Jewish education in Yiddish. In Vilna, moreover, Yiddish was recognized *de jure* as a language, and Jews were officially acknowledged as a nation.⁹⁶ In Warsaw, however, this was not the case. The local municipal authorities there did as they saw fit and refused to grant official status to Yiddish schools. The recognition of Yiddish as a language of instruction ended when responsibility for educational matters was transferred from the German administration to that of the Provisional Council of State in September 1917. With the start of the 1917/18 school year, the entire educational system came under Polish rule.

Once German policy changed, with the establishment of Polish governmental bodies to form the basis for an 'independent' state in Poland, the Polish authorities excluded Yiddish from the public sphere and defined Jewish education in Yiddish as private, although Jews were not denied the freedom to develop their own education system. The Polish authorities systematically refrained from granting

'Ludność białoruska a polska polityka mniejszościowa w okresie międzywojennym', *Etnografia Polska*, 39 (1995), 21.

⁹⁵ CZA, A127/386: 'Wyciąg ze stenogramu posiedzenia rady m. st. Warszawy dn. 24 czerwca 1918 r.'

⁹⁶ Š. Liekis, *A State within a State? Jewish Autonomy in Lithuania, 1918–1925* (Vilnius, 2003), 49–50.

instruction in Yiddish a public, state-related status, but repeatedly stressed its standing as a private system. Ultimately, Yiddish was divested of any connection to the state.

In addressing the issue of the official status of minority languages, the Polish administration recognized German, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian, but not the language of the Jewish population—Yiddish. The regulation that recognized Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and German confirmed that the new Polish state acknowledged an obligation to grant rights to minority cultures in the nascent state, which was at least partially multinational and multilingual. Such regulations generally acknowledged the special rights of minority languages, for example with guarantees that they would not be engulfed by the majority language and culture. However, in this particular regulation, these rights were not made universal. The regulation made a distinction between one minority—the Jews—and the others—Ukrainians, Germans, Belarusians, and Lithuanians. Why did the Polish authorities refuse to extend the same guarantees to the Jewish minority?

The issue was not entirely one of German coercion to recognize the languages of all the minorities, because while the German occupiers put pressure on the Poles to recognize German, they made no effort to compel them to recognize the Lithuanian or Ukrainian minorities and their languages.⁹⁷ Further, it was not purely an issue of territorial versus extraterritorial minorities, since the Germans were scattered throughout the country, while the Lithuanian minority, for example, was concentrated mainly in the north-east. Nor was it purely an instance of a distinction made between religious and national minorities, since in the case of the German national minority, educational autonomy was to be administered by two networks on a denominational basis.⁹⁸

Likewise, it was not only a propaganda tool to gain control over areas to the east of Congress Poland, although a propagandistic element certainly existed, because the recognition of Yiddish in the eastern areas would actually promote support by the Jewish population for Polish claims. When at the beginning of 1918 the issue of recognizing the minority rights of the Jews in Lithuania as a tool to gain their support for the Polish cause was debated, Grendyszyński rejected it categorically because ‘it will be a dangerous matter from the point of view of the relations in Congress Poland’.⁹⁹ When Lithuanians later used their recognition of Jewish ethno-cultural claims to strengthen Lithuanian claims to Vilnius, the Polish policy did not change.¹⁰⁰ In any event, these Polish expansionist plans were unrealistic in

⁹⁷ AAN, TRS, Sprawy Oświaty, Akt 11: Posiedzenia Wydziału Wykonawczego w d. 17.IV.17.

⁹⁸ Handelsman, ‘Les Efforts de la Pologne pour la reconstruction d’un état indépendant’, 180; Krasowski, *Związki myznanitowe w II Rzeczypospolitej*, 208, 210.

⁹⁹ Lietuvos mokslų akademijos Vrublevskių biblioteka, Vilnius (hereafter LMAVB), Dept. of Manuscripts (Class DM), F79, vnt. 830: ‘Narada w sprawie Żydów na kresach’, Warsaw, 2 Jan. 1918.

¹⁰⁰ Z. Balshan, ‘Ma’avakam shel yehudei lita al zekhuyoteihem hale’umiyot, 1917–1918’, *Shevut*, 10 (1984), 80–2; Liekis, *A State within a State?*, 72–5.

late 1917, given the realpolitik of German hegemony in the second half of 1917 and its interpretation by key members of the Provisional Council.¹⁰¹

The refusal to recognize Yiddish was not based mainly on theoretical or normative grounds, as there was no Polish interest in embarking on a sincere discussion about whether Yiddish was a language, and the 'Provisional Council did not deal with theoretical considerations', as Józef Lewandowski ironically put it.¹⁰² It is true that the view that Yiddish was a debased form of German was widespread among the public. This was similar to the disdain felt for Belarusian as a rustic and crude local dialect.¹⁰³ Yet political leaders' disdain for Belarusian (and Lithuanian) did not prevent the recognition of these languages in the periphery of the country, alongside the total denial of recognition to Yiddish.¹⁰⁴

Moreover, this rejection cannot be mainly attributed to growing conflict between the Jews and the Poles, inasmuch as a similar intensification was taking place in the clash between the Polish and Lithuanian national movements at that time.¹⁰⁵ Lastly, antisemitic tendencies cannot be ignored, as they did indeed exist, but not to an extent that was greater than anti-Ukrainian fears or anti-German sentiment.

The decision made by the Provisional Council even stated that such rights should not be extended to nations that had 'immigrated' to the country as distinct from 'autochthonous' populations. However, minority rights were guaranteed to the Ukrainian population, which was expected to re-emigrate to the eastern peripheries of Congress Poland, and guaranteed to the German minority even in areas where it was considered as 'foreign', as shown above, but simultaneously denied to the local Polish Jews that had been present for centuries. In fact, the wording of the regulation explicitly stated that the Jews may not be considered as a group having national or linguistic rights.¹⁰⁶ My argument is that, undoubtedly, all the reasons cited above did deeply influence the exclusion of the Yiddish vernacular from the public sphere, yet they are insufficient to explain its total exclusion there and the simultaneous acknowledgement of the Slavonic and Baltic vernaculars in the eastern parts of Congress Poland.

I would like to add another dimension. According to my interpretation, another important reason why the Polish authorities refused to extend the same guarantees

¹⁰¹ LMAVB, Dept. of Manuscripts (Class DM), F79, vnt. 830: 'Narada w sprawie Żydów na kresach', Warsaw, 2 Jan. 1918.

¹⁰² J. Lewandowski, *Federalizm: Litwa i Białoruś w polityce obozu belwederskiego, XI. 1918–IV. 1920* (Warsaw, 1962), 50.

¹⁰³ W. Mich, *Problem mniejszości narodowych w myśli politycznej polskiego ruchu konserwatywnego, 1918–1939* (Lublin, 1992), 159–60.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. See also J. Tomaszewski, 'Kresy Wschodnie w polskiej myśli politycznej XIX i XX w.', in W. Wrzesiński (ed.), *Między Polską etniczną a historyczną* (Wrocław, 1988), 38–9, 111.

¹⁰⁵ See e.g. P. Łossowski, *Konflikt polsko-litewski, 1918–1920* (Warsaw, 1996), 18–20, 22–4.

¹⁰⁶ CZA, A8/37/3: 'Bericht der Reise der Herren Dr. Adolf Friedmann, Dr. Franz Oppenheimer und Prof. Sobernheim nach dem östlichen Okkupationsgebiet im April/Mai 1917'; CZA, L6/106: Berger to Zentralbüro, 6 May 1917.

to the Jewish minority, and what underlay the seemingly disproportionate significance they attached to linguistic demands, may be understood from an analysis of the socio-economic implications of linguistic recognition. Here I follow the argument presented by Przeździecki in the debate in the Provisional Council, who connected the *Sprachenrecht* of the minorities and the ethnically biased character of the labour market.¹⁰⁷

There were important structural differences between Jews and the Slavonic and Baltic minorities which clearly affected the recognition of minority languages. Jews were for the most part an urban minority, while Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians were predominantly agrarian. My claim is that the economic structure, conditions, and extant institutions at the disposal of a given minority group define the extent to which it is able to take advantage of the legal and administrative measures to safeguard it against the infringement of its culture and language by the majority group and effectively implement the substance of official recognition as a minority culture.¹⁰⁸

Each of three minorities—Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians—was considered mainly as a backward people not threatening the hegemonic power. As Włodzimierz Mich has argued, Polish conservatives did not consider Belarusian national demands as having any significant impact on the situation of the state. They regarded the Belarusians or the Ukrainians in the eastern areas of Congress Poland as no more than masses of peasants,¹⁰⁹ and granted recognition of their rights only in a clearly delimited area, in order to be able to claim that the emerging Polish state was meeting the cultural needs of its Slavonic and Baltic minorities. The recognition of their linguistic rights would also ease communication with populations considered almost exclusively agrarian and primitive, as well as facilitate their administration and supervision.

However, the minority rights conferred on the Slavonic and Baltic minorities applied only in peripheral territories and preserved their situation of a rural minority there. The granting of such minority rights did not threaten the ethno-national hegemony that the Provisional Council aimed to establish. In addition, schools whose language of instruction was that of a minority were created slowly and inefficiently, and they were mostly based on those introduced by the German occupation authorities; clearly they were kept marginalized.¹¹⁰ Studnicki was later to claim,

¹⁰⁷ AAN, TRS, Akt 7, Sprawy Samorządowe, 5 Mar. 1917.

¹⁰⁸ On the connection between formal legal definitions and socio-economic conditions, see N. Fraser, 'From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Post-Socialist" Age', *New Left Review*, 212 (1995), 68–93. Regarding the linguistic demands of a given minority and its social structure, see Hroch, *Social Interpretation of Linguistic Demands*, 31–7.

¹⁰⁹ Mich, *Problem mniejszości narodowych*, 155, 157.

¹¹⁰ J. Ogonowski, *Uprawnienia językowe mniejszości narodowych w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 1918–1939* (Warsaw, 2000), 22–3, 62–3. It should be mentioned that the rights granted to Jews studying in the Polish schools, such as the exemption from writing on the sabbath, were scarcely implemented either: J.

when confronted with opposition to the new regulations, that Belarusian schools did not offer any professional training.¹¹¹

This bears out Hroch's theory that the introduction of a non-dominant language into the administration, bureaucracy, and politics ensures the inclusion of the minority in the state apparatus and state elites, thus ensuring its equal access to state resources. In this case, however, these legal safeguards were granted to minorities living in outlying peripheral and agrarian districts, which was not the case for the Jews. The educational autonomy and linguistic recognition given to these groups kept them in the territorial (and cultural) periphery and thereby bound them to the economic system of the past. A priori, the opportunities for economic upward mobility within each of these agrarian societies were extremely limited in the newly emerging national states, while the educational autonomy that was granted to them limited these possibilities even further. By allowing schooling in minority languages, and the symbolic recognition of these languages in the countryside, the authorities, intentionally or unintentionally, bound Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians to social and geographical peripheries blocking their access to the hegemonic institutions of the new state in formation. Moreover, the upward mobility offered to integrated Belarusians or Ukrainians in central and western Poland was through blue-collar jobs, for example as watchmen, janitors, or porters.¹¹² Instead of endowing the young people of these agrarian minorities with the socio-economic capabilities they needed to integrate successfully into the apparatus of power of the new state, this legislation in effect reduced their chances of doing so. At play was a strategy of the reproduction of the Polish literates, to use a concept developed by Bourdieu,¹¹³ whereby non-dominant groups were forced to concede their positions to the preferred populace—ethnic Poles. An education system that preserved the language and culture of the hinterlands of necessity widened the gap between the populations of these areas and that in the centre, in favour of the latter. In this case, as opposed to the theoretical approach, the recognition of such a language constituted nothing less than a strategy of exclusion.

It is my contention that, indeed, this was precisely an important reason why the new Polish administration refused to recognize Yiddish as a societal culture and language. The structural positioning of the Jews was different. Jews were already positioned in the cities, or were considered poised to migrate there. In contrast to the Belarusian, Lithuanian, or Ukrainian peasantry, their presence in the urban middle class constituted a threat to various political groupings in Poland, who were

Żyndul, *Państwo w państwie? Autonomia narodowo-kulturalna w Europie Środkowowschodniej w XX wieku* (Warsaw, 2000), 123; Zieliński, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, 326–7.

¹¹¹ Mich, *Problem mniejszości narodowych*, 159.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ P. Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron, *La Reproduction: Éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement* (Paris, 1970); in English, P. Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. R. Nice (London, 1990).

extremely concerned about the growing Jewish preponderance in the cities. Although the socio-economic role of Jews in Polish society was varied and shifted over time, with great regional variations as well, the prevailing stereotype of the Jews as a 'middleman minority'¹¹⁴ remained fairly stable, and it was precisely this stereotype that dictated Polish policy. More significantly, the role of Jews in this new urban society (characterized by a still deep cultural division of labour, as Michael Hechter described this concept¹¹⁵) was well known in Polish ruling circles. In short, the relationship between the Jewish population and the newly emerged Polish authorities was moulded by the prevailing stereotype of the Jews, and by the preponderant role of Jews as middlemen in the new urban economy. In the perception of the Provisional Council, Jews were a threat to the notion of a Polish national state-building project.

The recognition of Yiddish, as the Yiddish intelligentsia fervently demanded, would have established Yiddish literacy as a 'real entrance-card to full citizenship and . . . social participation',¹¹⁶ in Ernest Gellner's metaphor, or at least as a means of gaining access to the emerging state apparatus. The argument presented by Przeździecki in the debate in the Provisional Council clearly linked the *Sprachenrecht* of the minorities and their appointment as civil servants, a prominent theme in the discussion concerning the rights of Yiddish, as noted above.¹¹⁷ The entrance card of Yiddish literacy would have given Jews full access to the state apparatus and turned their bilingualism into a functional asset.¹¹⁸ The recognition of Yiddish

¹¹⁴ The term 'middleman minority' defines traits associated with various ethnic minorities noted for their commercial abilities; permanent middle-class minorities; and a large marginalization in the distribution of political power. See E. Bonacich, 'A Theory of Middleman Minorities', *American Sociological Review*, 38 (1973), 583–94. See also F. Barth, 'Introduction', in id. (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture and Difference* (Bergen, 1969), 9–38.

¹¹⁵ M. Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536–1966* (London, 1975), 39–40.

¹¹⁶ E. Gellner, *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (Cambridge, 1988), 16 (emphasis original).

¹¹⁷ AAN, TRS, Akt 7, Sprawy Samorządowe, 5 Mar. 1917.

¹¹⁸ For an excellent analysis of the multilingual system of one particular Jew, representative of a widespread pattern in Jewish life in inter-war Poland, see Batsheva Ben-Amos's insightful study of the multilingual diary of a young man from the Łódź ghetto, probably born immediately after the end of the First World War: B. Ben-Amos, 'A Multilingual Diary from the Ghetto', *Gal-ed*, 19 (2004), 51–74. Many Jews were bilingual (Yiddish/Polish) or multilingual, especially in intelligentsia circles, and employed what Itamar Even-Zohar calls a 'multilingual system', speaking different languages in different circumstances: I. Even-Zohar, 'Aspects of the Hebrew–Yiddish Polysystem: A Case of a Multilingual Polysystem', *Poetics Today*, 11 (1990), 121–30. As Ben-Amos pointed out ('Multilingual Diary from the Ghetto', 60–1), Shmeruk made use of the model developed by Even-Zohar and, referring to this aspect of Jewish life in inter-war Poland, emphasized the connections between the different languages in this multilingual polysystem: C. Shmeruk, 'Hebrew–Yiddish–Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture', in Y. Gutman et al. (eds.), *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars* (Hanover, NH, 1989), 285–311. On the changing linguistic behaviour of the Jewish population, see I. Bartal, 'Midu leshoniyut masoratit lehad leshoniyut le'umit', *Shevut*, 15 (1992), 183–94. The form of bilingualism so widespread in Jewish life (the dominance of the two main municipal vernaculars: Polish and Yiddish)

might even have brought about the establishment of a dual ‘state nobility’ (Polish and Yiddish/Jewish), to use another of Bourdieu’s concepts, referring to the elites whose power comes from state recognition of their cultural capital as an adequate source of legitimacy to their claim for power in the state.¹¹⁹ The recognition of Yiddish would have introduced a dual administrative apparatus in the cities in two languages—Polish and Yiddish. Recognizing the Yiddish vernacular as a societal language would have turned the government apparatus in the city—the nucleus of the nascent state—into a bilingual entity; here we see the same factor at play as accounted for the attempt to exclude the German language in Łódź, as noted earlier. Such recognition would have given access to the Jewish intelligentsia, which in many cases had mastered both languages. The new Polish state institutions sought to block the Yiddish intelligentsia from access to the new arena of power—the emerging state apparatus, along the lines of Hroch’s paradigm. By curtailing the upper mobility of the Yiddish intelligentsia in the cities, where their demographic presence was significant, the new urban professions of the nascent state apparatus could be reserved exclusively for the monolingual Polish intelligentsia.

However, not all members of the Yiddish-speaking community became bilingual. Quite the contrary, a large proportion probably did not,¹²⁰ and had to communicate with the newly formed state bureaucracy in Polish, a language only partially comprehensible to them. Approaching the authorities from a disadvantaged position, and using a non-societal language, they ended up in an inferior position even at the most basic practical level, with all the feelings of humiliation involved. Incompetence in the societal language gradually became a variable in hampering the social mobility of the Yiddish-speaking population. This obstacle would empower the Polish rural population, who were migrating to the cities at the time, while disabling the Jews, who were also moving to the cities then, or were already there.

The alternative offered by the authorities—permitting Yiddish in the traditional Jewish education system with a degree of exposure to the Polish language—was yet another means to control access to the new ‘state nobility’. The traditional Jewish school system was less perceptive about the principle of equal treatment

was less present in non-Jewish society. Other forms of bilingualism (Polish–German) were present in some non-Jewish circles. See e.g. K. Radziszewska and K. Woźniak (eds.), *Pod jednym dachem: Niemcy oraz ich polscy i żydowscy sąsiedzi w Łodzi w XIX i XX wieku / Unter einem Dach: Die Deutschen und ihre polnischen und jüdischen Nachbarn in Lodz im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Łódź, 2000), 127, 138. On social interaction between Jews and non-Jews in nineteenth-century Łódź which demonstrated other forms of bilingualism, see F. Guesnet, *Lodzer Juden im 19. Jahrhundert: Ihr Ort in einer multikulturellen Stadtgesellschaft* (Leipzig, 1997).

¹¹⁹ Bourdieu, *La Noblesse d’état*.

¹²⁰ For a statistical analysis of the languages used by Jews based on the census of 1931, following over a decade of Polonization efforts by the state, see Y. Leshtshinski [J. Lestschinsky], ‘Di shprakhn bay yidn in umophengikn poyn: an analiz loyt der folkstseylung fun 1931’, *YIVO-bleter*, 22 (1943), 147–62.

independent of ethno-linguistic attributions, an idea considered subversive by the new authorities because of its ethno-nationalistic paradigm. Moreover, the traditional Jewish school system was less able to generate a 'state nobility', and as such did not constitute a source of competition with the Polish elite. Besides, it was a logical outcome to refuse the recognition of the modern network that might develop during the German occupation. Modern education could give students access to bodies of knowledge that could endanger the ethno-national vision of 'the new Poland' of the appointed Polish authorities. The same logic lay behind the under-developing of the Polish-language elementary education for Jews, its under-budgeting, and the discrimination against it.¹²¹

The alternative of assimilation was far from dependent on individual decisions, as access to the ranks of the ruling nation was not automatic. On the one hand, the Provisional Council was aware of the need to open the state apparatus to some educated members of the ethnic minorities,¹²² yet it feared too large a mass of such candidates moving up from the lower linguistic strata into the mainstream and competing with the state nobility, as Przędziecki observed.¹²³ The minorities, therefore, were channelled to a peripheral out-group status even if they assimilated the dominant state culture.

In summary, the uneven division of the mother-tongue resource between the various ethnic groups in Congress Poland facilitated the formation of a social structure and a social hierarchy that the emerging Polish administration viewed as desirable. Their preoccupation with the distribution of this resource reflected a perceived threat posed by the Jewish minority, and especially by its Yiddish intelligentsia, which they viewed as undermining the ethno-national hegemony they sought to entrench and threatening the very legitimacy of the model of the state in formation. This was reflected not only in decisions of the Provisional Council regarding the structure of society and the distribution of salaries, but, more broadly, in the establishment of a hegemonic cultural capital. The policy established by the new Polish administrative authorities regarding selective linguistic recognition allowed them to keep the Jewish minority from gaining access to positions that would enable them to undermine the existing order and use their status in the urban social structure to enter the political hierarchy. Simultaneously, the language policy was a tool used by the vulnerable Polish leadership in an attempt to insulate society from the infiltration of subversive ideas not only of the left wing, but involving civic notions of citizenship present even within the Polish national movement itself.

The legal system shaped by the Polish leadership, in seeking to give preference to the cultural capital of the Polish majority, tried thereby to curb the access of the Yiddish intelligentsia to the state nobility, or block any step that might enhance its

¹²¹ CZA, A127/386: 'Wyciąg ze stenogramu posiedzenia rady m. st. Warszawy dn. 24 czerwca 1918 r.'

¹²² Suleja, *Tymczasowa Rada Stanu*, 172–9; APKr, NKN, Szg. 11: Sprawy oświaty, 27 Feb. 1917.

¹²³ AAN, TRS, Akt 7, Sprawy Samorządowe, 5 Mar. 1917.

position in Polish society. This was the reasoning behind its refusal to grant educational autonomy to the Jews.

The Yiddish intelligentsia was bent on attaining rights for the Jewish minority, which would secure its status in the society and consequently establish its role in the political hierarchy. However, they were confronted with a special problem which they could not overcome: that these very demands worsened their already inferior political status vis-à-vis the Polish majority. The emerging state, by refusing to grant rights to the Jewish minority, would thus be able to give preference to the favoured element of society, which was in competition with the Jews. In the absence of a central government that might have shown an interest in cultivating the multinational and multilingual aspect of the country, the Jewish population faced a cruel paradox. The combination of their urban lifestyle, specialization in occupations that were suitable to the new economy, and middleman social stratification, along with a distinctive cultural identity and a condition of political weakness, resulted in tragic, if well-known outcomes at the end of the First World War.

