

**Di folkloristik: A Good Yiddish Word**



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## NOTES

### *Di folkloristik: A Good Yiddish Word*

The following contribution to the folkloristics controversy is intended to shift the discussion initiated by Bruce Jackson in a recent issue of this journal (Jackson 1985) away from a condemnation of the term toward a consideration of terminology as a problem in the intellectual history of the field. Contrary to Jackson's claims (1985:99), Richard M. Dorson and his colleagues on the editorial board of the *Journal of the Folklore Institute* were not the first to introduce the term "folkloristics" to American scholarship in 1964.

Though I will focus on Yiddish here, perhaps others will address parallel usages in other languages, particularly Russian. The 1950 translation of Y. M. Sokolov's *Russian Folklore* (1966[1938])—which used to be required reading at the Folklore Institute, Indiana University—devotes a chapter to the "Nature of Folklore and the Problems of Folkloristics" and offers a brief history of the terms:

This term [folklore] was quite rapidly adopted by scholars in other countries, and soon became an international one.

This term was at first used to denote only the materials included in the scope of this study; later on, it was frequently used to designate also the branch of science which devotes itself to the study of this material.

At the present time [1930s], in accordance with the practice of the majority of European and Soviet scholars, the term "folklore" is used to designate the material of study; to indicate the science which deals with this material, the term "folkloristics" is employed. [Sokolov 1966:3]

In support of this statement, Sokolov sends the reader to Kaindl (1903:22–23), van Gennep (1924), and Kagarov (1929). Not surprisingly, the English translation of Sokolov repeatedly uses "folklore" and "folkloristics" to differentiate the material from the discipline, as has been the case in Russian (*fol'kloristika* and *fol'klor*) since at least the 1920s: see, for example, Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev's article, "Die Folklore als eine besondere Form des Schaffens," written in 1929, was published in Russian in 1931. Similarly, [*die*] *Folkloristik* appears as a noun referring to the discipline that studies [*die*] *Folklore* in the German text by Jakobson and Bogatyrev (1929). This article is especially rich in folklore compounds: *Folklore-Material*, *Folklore-Sujets*, *Folklore-Kunstformen*, *Folkloreformen*, *Folkloresyklen*, *Folkloreattung*, *Folklore-Werkes*, *Folklorestoff*, *Folklorerepertoires*, *Folkloregebildes*, *Folkloredichter*, *Folklorewissenschaft*, *Folkloreforscher*.<sup>1</sup>

Reflecting the ambiguity of using one term to refer to both the discipline and the materials, Hultkrantz (1960:135) divides the entry folklore into "the materials of folklore" and "the science which studies this tradition." He provides three synonyms for the discipline: "The main difficulty with the concept [folklore]—that is, the science of [folklore], "Folkloristik"—is its clash with the comprehensive and well-organized science of ethnology" (Hultkrantz 1960:140). Hultkrantz does not devote a separate entry to "Folkloristik."

For more than half a century of Yiddish usage, [*di*] *folkloristik*, a noun, has referred to the study of folklore and [*der*] *folklor* to the material that is studied. The term "folkloristics" figures in discussions in English of Yiddish folklore from at least the 1950s. Early studies of Yiddish folklore in the 19th century appeared in Russian, Polish, German, English, and other languages. By the 20th century a major effort was made to publish studies of Yiddish folklore in Yiddish and to develop the appropriate Yiddish terminology for the purpose. The interest in terminology for scholarly discussions of folklore was part of a larger concern with the philological study of Yiddish, the standardizing of orthography, and the place of Yiddish in modern Jewish life. That interest remains. During the recent fad of light bulb jokes, one might be asked, "How many Yiddishists does it take to screw in a light bulb?" The answer: "Ten. One to screw in the bulb and nine to work out the terminology."

I have discussed elsewhere in Yiddish the richness of Yiddish terminology for folklore and its study (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1972). The terms include: *folklor*, *folkshafung*, *folkskenerishe mater-yaln*, *folkskentenish*, *folkestimlekh*, *folklorishkayt*, *folkloristish*, *folklorizm*, *folkloristik*, *folklor-arbet*, *folklor-forshung*, *felker-kentenish*, *folklorist*, *folk*, *folksmentsh*, etc. A rich array of terms could also be provided for ethnography, ethnology, and culture.

The use of *folkloristik* to refer to the study of folklore appears in Yiddish steadily from at least the 1930s in Poland, the Soviet Union, and the United States, as well as in writings about Jewish folklore in English.<sup>2</sup> Uriel Weinreich, one of the most important contributors to semantic theory in general linguistics in the 20th century, includes the Yiddish term *folkloristik* in his *Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary* (1968) and the English term "folkloristics" in the bibliography of Yiddish language and folklore he co-authored with Beatrice Weinreich (Weinreich and Weinreich 1959). Section 14.g of the bibliography is entitled "History of Yiddish Folkloristics; Necrology." The use of *folklor* and *folkloristik* to distinguish the material from the discipline is well established in Yiddish and has been given careful consideration by several generations of scholars concerned with developing precise terminology for the concepts they used in their work.

I leave it to the philologists and sociolinguists to account for how and why the English word "folklore" entered Yiddish, Russian, German, Polish, French, Spanish, Hebrew, and other languages, which in turn generated new nuances of meaning, terminological refinements, forms, and compounds of the word unknown in English.<sup>3</sup> Two of the greatest linguists of our time, Roman Jakobson and Uriel Weinreich, used the term "folkloristics" and its equivalent in various languages with intelligence and taste. Perhaps "folkloristics" is a debt English owes to thoughtful European usage and specifically to folklorists who work in more than one language.<sup>4</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>In his German textbook *Volkskunde*, first published in 1971, Bausinger uses the term *Folkloristik* to refer to the discipline that studies *Folklore* (Bausinger 1979:50, 54, 265ff.), as did Moser (1962) a decade earlier. American scholars working outside of the European tradition also used the term "folkloristics" prior to 1964; see, for example, Armstrong (1959). Though the term "folklore" and many of its derivatives had appeared in German by the 1890s and gained wide currency in German after World War II, the term "folklorism" did not take hold in German until the late 1950s, whereas the term appears in Russian and Yiddish during the interwar years. Heintz (1958) is credited with introducing the term "folklorism" to German. This development, and specifically the use of "folkloristic," "folkloristics," and "folklorism"—and the relation of these terms to applied folklore—are discussed by Moser (1962). For comprehensive lists of terms and usages, see Bødker (1965) and Multkrantz (1960).

<sup>2</sup>The term *folkloristik* appears, for example, in Beregovski (1932), Cahan (1952), *Filologishe sektsye* (1925, 1938), Finkl (1948), Kapełus (1970), Krzyżanowski (1965), Mark (1951), Mlotek (1977–78), Rabinovits (1942), and Viner (1932).

<sup>3</sup>Hultkrantz (1960:139) documents how the term "folklore" supplanted other designations in French by the 1880s and in other languages by the turn of the century.

<sup>4</sup>I would like to thank Regina Bendix for allowing me to read her unpublished paper, "Folklorism: A Threat or a Challenge" (1984).

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\*[Note: The capitalization conventions of each language have been retained in the following references.]

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### On the Final [s] in “Folkloristics”

In a recent issue of the *Journal of American Folklore* Bruce Jackson pleads with folklorists to rid themselves of the term “folkloristics” (Jackson 1985). Toward the conclusion of his statement he addresses all of us passionately: “Let’s abandon this neologism with its pompous and misleading suffixes, this clumsy construct that does not propel us into the modern age but instead makes us appear slightly silly to anyone who knows the English language well” (1985:99–100). Three reasons have motivated Jackson to write his discourse on “folkloristics”: taste, collective self-presentation, and grammar. He finds this neologism unappealing; it damages the public image of the discipline; and grammatically “folkloristics” is an anomalous construction. Ob-