

THE VERNACULAR LANGUAGES  
USED BY SLOVAK JEWRY

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Slovak Jewry represented a multi-linguality typical for a Central Europe where living circumstances of the Jewish population underwent frequent changes. When Jews arrived in what was then Upper Hungary, they used to speak a derivative of Yiddish, “jidiš-dajč” or “Jiddisch-Deutsch”. Subsequently, Joseph II. forced them to adopt German. After the “Ausgleich” of 1867, Hungarian authorities insisted on them speaking Hungarian. Those Jews living in a rural environment traditionally spoke Slovak or Moravian dialects, but after the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic they switched to standard Slovak. Emigrés from Galicia spoke Galician Yiddish. Communities situated not far from the Hungarian border, but also people who had attended Hungarian schools in cities such as Bratislava and Košice, stuck to Hungarian. The Jewish population in the northern Slovak regions Zips (Spiš) and the “Hauerland” cultivated German. During their daily prayers, Jews used Hebrew, even though many did not understand it. When Zionism became popular, so did modern Hebrew. Thus, a typical young Slovak Jew spoke three to five languages.