

**Rakhmiel Peltz. *From Immigrant to Ethnic Culture: American Yiddish in South Philadelphia*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). xi, 269 pp., \$18.95 paper, \$49.50 cloth.**

Rakhmiel Peltz, in *From Immigrants to Ethnic Culture: American Yiddish in South Philadelphia*, presents one of the few ethnographies available on spoken American Yiddish in his investigation of the elderly children of immigrant Jews in a Philadelphia neighborhood. Drawing on audiotaped ethnographic data which includes life histories, personal narratives, interviews, and naturally-occurring interactions in local contexts, Peltz examines how Jewish residents attempt to maintain their yiddishkayt ('Jewishness') as they become a shrinking minority in what was once a thriving Jewish community.

Integrating approaches from sociolinguistics, gerontology, psychology, and anthropology, Peltz focuses on the interface of Jewish ethnic identity and Yiddish use across the lifecycle as a critical site for understanding how ethnic identities change over time and space. Residents' institutional affiliations and social networks are examined as Peltz considers social relationships within and across ethnic boundaries and generations. A sociolinguistic analysis of the pragmatics of English and Yiddish use in social interactions is a contribution of Peltz's study. The analysis is located in a comparative framework of sociolinguistic approaches of the study of bilingualism.

An unusual feature of this ethnography is the central role played Yiddish of his childhood and longings for a flourishing Yiddish-speaking community. However, Peltz does more than locate his own position as a "semi-insider". He also, as he acknowledges, "introduces Yiddish in contexts where it was not typically found, but where it could be spoken" (206). For example, a great deal of Yiddish-language data was generated in a Yiddish conversation class, a *gleyzele tey* ('a glass of tea'), he began at the local senior community center. He further initiated conversations and interviews in Yiddish, although most of the residents used primarily English (though many were fluent Yiddish speakers). Peltz can be viewed as an activist-ethnographer, committed to using a shared ethnic language to reinvigorate associations among language, memory, and group identity.

An implication of Peltz's stance is that the monograph is often a celebratory account rather than a critical investigation of social and linguistic change. In fact, as Peltz notes, prior to his community involvement Yiddish was used in only a few restricted contexts by community members, and most have not transmitted Yiddish to their children. As a result, we learn little of the power relationships and language ideologies which might have motivated speakers to use primarily English. There are hints that issues of social class are important. Peltz notes that these elderly Jews expressed ambivalence toward their working-class immigrant community and their home language, Yiddish (e.g. 127).

Further, Peltz's focus on the notion of "acts of identity" as elaborated by creolists R.B. Le Page and Andree Tabouret-Keller (1985, *Acts of Identity: Creole-Based Approaches to Language and Ethnicity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), means less attention is paid to "difference" as a site for identity construction. Intersections of gender, race, and class, in the construction of ethnic identity are downplayed.

Peltz's focus remains on the emotional gratification that elderly residents reaped from having new contexts and interlocutors for speaking Yiddish. The language and their early experiences with it in the private sphere of the home, Peltz argues, form the basis for an ethnic identity which can be mobilized at different periods across the lifecycle. There must be, however, group contexts for this resource to be mobilized. Peltz's mission is to provide those group contexts in order to strengthen a shared sense of ethnic identity. His mission, however, places limits on the scope and depth of his ethnographic analysis.

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**William S. Penn, ed. *As We Are Now*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997). 255 pp., \$45.00 cloth, \$16.95 paper.**

There is an old spoken French Creole proverb that goes: *Bay Kou Blie, Pote'Mak Soje* (He who strikes the blow forgets, he who bears the marks remembers). *As We Are Now* is a book of essays that reveals hidden memories retained in the collective conscience of many of America's indigenous peoples who bear the painful marks of past history. The thirteen contributors discuss and analyze mainstream American responses to the act of cross-fertilization, an act of love by persons from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds who dared to intermarry or bond with an underclass—people of color. Their narratives are both bold and introspective. In a straightforward search for truth, their perspectives weave heretofore neglected patterns of clarity in offspring voices identified as *Mestizaje*, mixed, mixedblood, mixblood (editor's choice), crossblood, *Mestizo*. Arturo Aldama states: "We cannot discuss who 'we are now' as Indian crossbloods and mestizos/as without understanding the violence of history and our strategic and spontaneous resistance to the forces of material and discursive colonialism" (143).

What emerges in these essays are self-actualized definitions of identity; recognizing full well the existence of a privileged identity grounded in American psychosocial value orientations that elevated one cultural lifestyle over another, that equated things European with proper