

Fundamental Concepts in Sociolinguistics
Professor Doctor Om Prakash
Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida
Lecture 47
Uriel Weinreich and His Work

Welcome to class. We are continuing with the series of talks that we have been doing on pioneers in the field of sociolinguistics and the pillars who contributed immensely to the emergence of this discipline. One such name is Uriel Weinreich and today we are going to talk about Uriel Weinreich and his works.

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The slide features a portrait of Uriel Weinreich on the left, a list of biographical facts in the center, and a photograph of Professor Om Prakash on the right. The NPTEL logo is in the top right corner.

Uriel Weinreich


- **Uriel Weinreich**
- 23 May 1926 – 30 March 1967
- He was a Polish-American Linguist.
- Uriel Weinreich was born in Wilno, Poland to a well-respected and established Wilno Jewish family.
- He was the first child of Max Weinreich and Regina Szabad.
- He earned his Ph.D. from Columbia University and taught in Yiddish studies, Sociolinguistics, and dialectology.

Weinreich was born on 23rd May, 1926 and died on 30th March, 1967. In his short span of life, he died little younger, and in his short span of life as an academician, researcher and a teacher; the kind of contributions he made in linguistics and various subfields of the discipline is remarkable and commendable. We will have a short and a brief survey of his journey as a linguist, as a teacher, as a researcher and his everlasting imprint and influence on the discipline.


He was a Polish-American linguist, Weinreich was born in Poland to a well-respected and very established affluent family. He was the first child of Max Weinreich, and to tell you, Max Weinreich was himself a renowned scholar. Labov was one of his students, so you can imagine the legacy Uriel Weinreich had and the kind of intellectual exposure he had since his childhood.

He earned his PhD from Columbia University and taught in Yiddish studies, sociolinguistics and dialectology.

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- He advocated the increased acceptance of semantics, and compiled the iconic *Modern English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English Dictionary*, published shortly after his death.
- Uriel Weinreich was a Yiddish and general linguist, editor, and educator. Despite his early death, he left behind him the equivalent of several lifetimes of research and creativity – an unbelievably wide range of investigations.



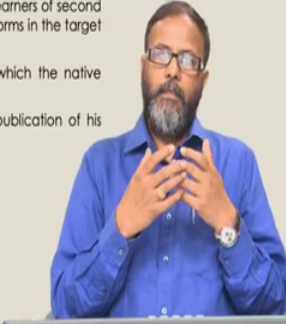
He advocated the increased acceptance of semantics and compiled the iconic ‘Modern English-Yiddish; Yiddish-English Dictionary’ which was published shortly after his death. Uriel Weinreich was a Yiddish and a general linguist; he was an editor and an educator. Despite his early death, he left behind him an equivalent of several lifetimes of research and creativity and an unbelievably wide range of investigations that he carried out during his lifetime.

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Journey



- Weinreich was the son of the linguist Max Weinreich , who was the mentor of both Marvin Herzog and William Labov.
- Weinreich is also credited with being the first linguist to recognize the phenomenon of Interlanguage 19 years before Larry Selinker coined the term in his 1972 article "Interlanguage".
- In his classic book *Languages in Contact*, Weinreich first noted that learners of second languages consider linguistic forms from their first language equal to forms in the target language.
- However, the essential inequality of these forms leads to speech which the native speakers of the target language consider unequal.
- He died of cancer on March 30, 1967, in New York, prior to the publication of his Yiddish-English dictionary.



If we glance at his illustrious academic journey, Weinreich was the son of linguist Max Weinreich of whom we just learned. Max was a mentor of both Marvin Herzog and William Labov, two very prominent sociolinguists. Junior Weinreich is also credited with being the first linguist to recognize the phenomenon of interlanguage and after 19 years of this recognition and identification, Larry Selinker published a work on interlanguage in 1972.

But while working on languages in contact, this idea was first noticed by Weinreich and it was translated into interlanguage by Larry Selinker. Interlanguage also remains a very significant work in second language acquisition, credited to Larry Selinker. However, this idea was noticed and identified by Uriel Weinreich 19 years before its publication by Larry Selinker.

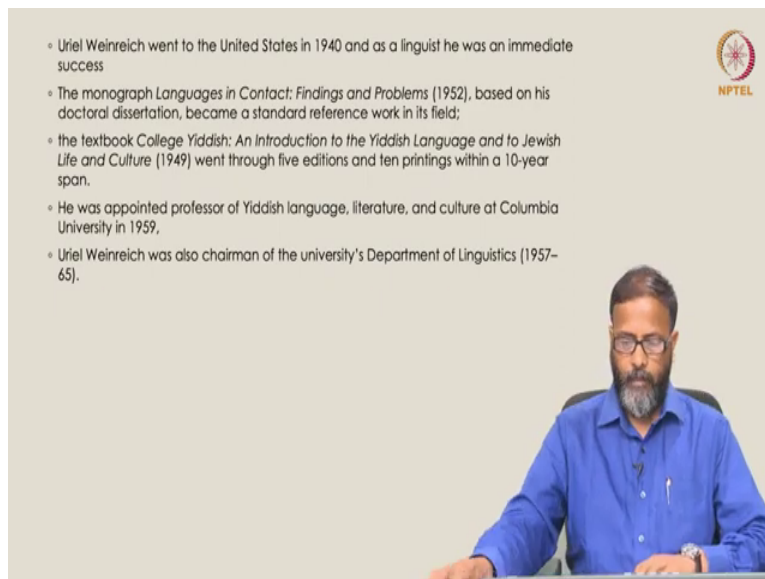
In his classic book 'Languages in Contact', Weinreich first noted that learners of second language consider linguistic forms from their first language equal to forms in the target language. So, this equivalence was noticed first by Weinreich during his work on languages in contact. We will talk about interlanguage in some other class but he was the first who noticed this phenomenon.

However, the essential inequality of these forms leads to speech which is, which the native speakers of target language consider unequal. Though Weinreich died of cancer on March 30th

1967, a very early death; prior to the publication of his wonderful work ‘Yiddish-English; English-Yiddish Dictionary’.

He is survived by a huge range of publications on various issues and sub-fields of the discipline which inspires all of us till date and which is relevant and significant in understanding sociolinguistics as a discipline. His masterpiece is ‘Languages in Contact’ which is still the primary resource and reference for people working in the language and contact sub-field.

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◦ Uriel Weinreich went to the United States in 1940 and as a linguist he was an immediate success

◦ The monograph *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems* (1952), based on his doctoral dissertation, became a standard reference work in its field;

◦ the textbook *College Yiddish: An Introduction to the Yiddish Language and to Jewish Life and Culture* (1949) went through five editions and ten printings within a 10-year span.

◦ He was appointed professor of Yiddish language, literature, and culture at Columbia University in 1959,

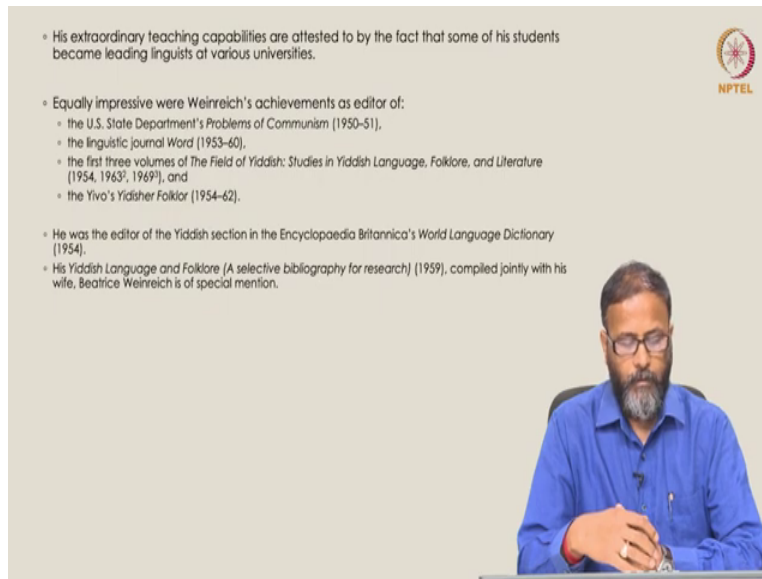
◦ Uriel Weinreich was also chairman of the university's Department of Linguistics (1957–65).

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Uriel Weinreich went to the United States in 1940 and as a linguist he was an immediate success. The monograph ‘Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems’ was published in 1952 based on his doctoral dissertation and became the standard reference work in this field. The textbook ‘College Yiddish: An Introduction to Yiddish language and to Jewish Life and Culture’ published in 1949 went through 5 editions and 10 reprintings within a 10 years of span after its publication.

So, you can imagine the impact of these two publications that he made. He was appointed Professor of Yiddish Language, Literature, and Culture at University of Colombia in 1959. Uriel Weinreich was also chairman of the University's Department of Linguistics from 1957 to 1965.

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His extraordinary teaching capabilities are attested to by the fact that some of his students became leading linguists at various universities.

Equally impressive were Weinreich's achievements as editor of:

- the U.S. State Department's *Problems of Communism* (1950-51),
- the linguistic journal *Word* (1953-60),
- the first three volumes of *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Yiddish Language, Folklore, and Literature* (1954, 1963, 1969), and
- the *Yivo's Yidisher Folklor* (1954-62).

He was the editor of the Yiddish section in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica's World Language Dictionary* (1954).

His *Yiddish Language and Folklore (A selective bibliography for research)* (1959), compiled jointly with his wife, Beatrice Weinreich is of special mention.

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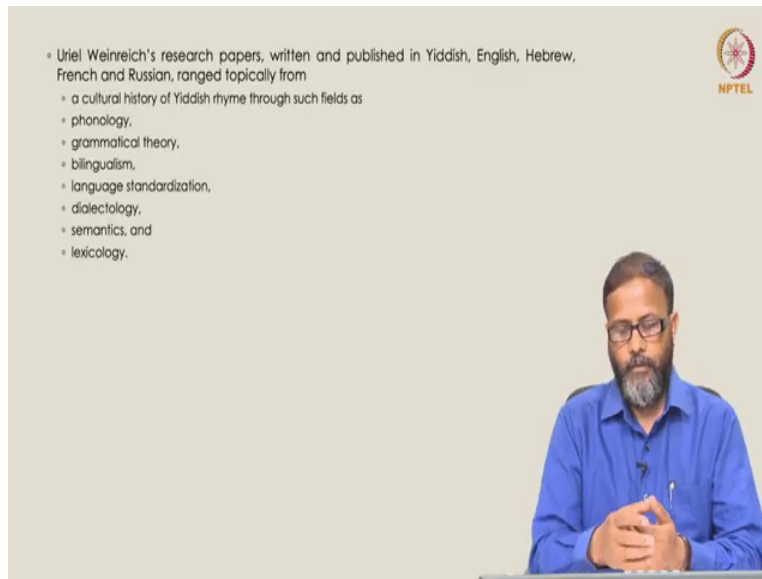
The slide also features a video inset of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a blue shirt, sitting at a desk and speaking.

His extraordinary teaching capabilities are attested by the fact that some of his students became leading linguists at various universities in America. And if you look at the work and the range of influence that he created in the discipline, it is immense. At the same time he made impressive achievements as an editor. He edited the US State Department's 'Problem of Communism', for which he remained as editor from 1950 to 1951.

He became the editor and worked in a linguistic journal called *Word* from 1953 to 1960. The first three volumes of 'The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Yiddish Language, Folklore and Literature'. In 1954, the first volume was published, 1963 the second volume and 1969, the third volume. He was also a very significant and a great contributor while editing 'Yivo's Yidisher Folklore', the journal which was very popular among the Yiddish speakers.

He was the editor of Yiddish section in the 'Encyclopedia Britannica World Language Dictionary' that was published in 1954 and his 'Yiddish Language and Folklore: A Selective Bibliography of Research', compiled jointly in 1959 with his accomplished wife Beatrice Weinreich is also of special mention.

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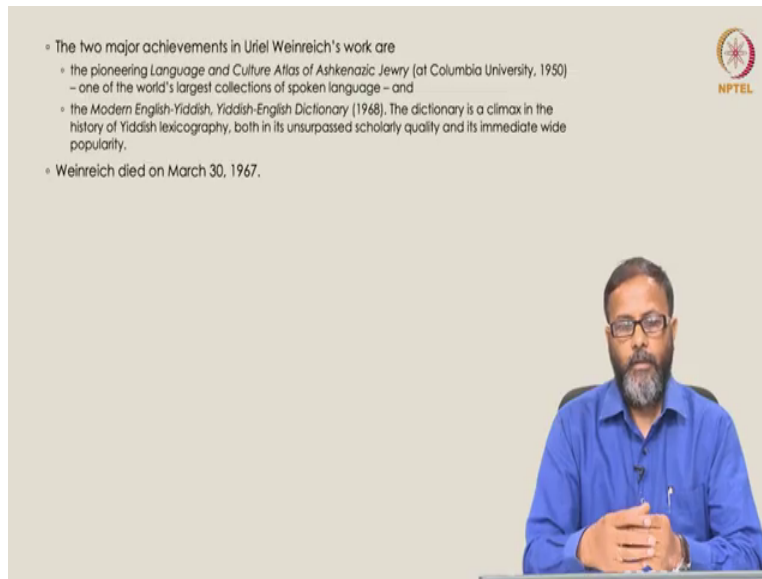


- Uriel Weinreich's research papers, written and published in Yiddish, English, Hebrew, French and Russian, ranged topically from
- a cultural history of Yiddish rhyme through such fields as
- phonology,
- grammatical theory,
- bilingualism,
- language standardization,
- dialectology,
- semantics, and
- lexicology.

Weinreich's research papers, monographs, and books were published in Yiddish, English, Hebrew, French and Russian and it ranged topically from a cultural history of Yiddish rhyme, through to such fields as phonology, grammatical theory, bilingualism, language standardization, dialectology, semantics and lexicology.

So, a wide range of themes that he covered in his work and he authoritatively wrote in all these subfields: phonology, grammatical theories, bilingualism, dialectology, semantics, and lexicology. His works are still quoted, referred to and remain a primary source of reference and understanding of these sub-fields.

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- The two major achievements in Uriel Weinreich's work are
 - the pioneering *Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry* (at Columbia University, 1950) – one of the world's largest collections of spoken language – and
 - the *Modern English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English Dictionary* (1968). The dictionary is a climax in the history of Yiddish lexicography, both in its unsurpassed scholarly quality and its immediate wide popularity.
- Weinreich died on March 30, 1967.

Two major achievements of Uriel Weinreich are: number one, the pioneering ‘Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry’ published in 1950 which is only the world's largest collection of spoken languages. And the second, ‘Modern English-Yiddish; Yiddish-English Dictionary’, 1968. The dictionary is a climax in the history of Yiddish lexicography both in unsurpassed scholarly quality and its immediate wide popularity.

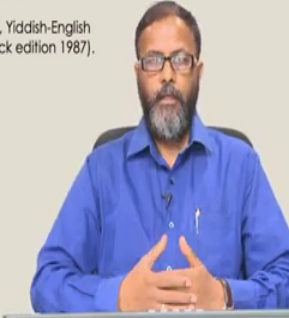
So, though it was published a year after his death, he is remembered for his work in language in contact and he is the one who documented Yiddish language and grammar, he created a number of primers, reference books, manuals, dictionaries, his work on bilingualism, and also his master class, ‘Languages in Contact’, for which he remains still the primary source in this field.

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Most widely held works


- *College Yiddish: An Introduction to the Yiddish Language and to Jewish Life and Culture* (Yivo, New York, 1st edition 1949, 6th edition 1999).
- *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems*, New York, 1953. Reprint, Mouton, The Hague, 1963.
- *Say It In Yiddish: A Phrase Book for Travelers* (with Beatrice Weinreich). Dover, New York, 1958.
- *Modern english-yidish yidish-english verterbukh*. Modern English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English Dictionary (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1968 and Schocken, new paperback edition 1987).
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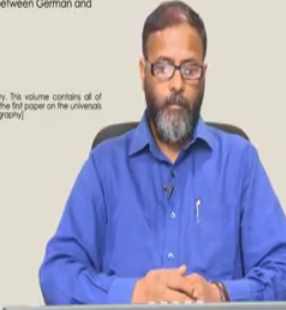
If you look at the widely hailed works of Weinreich, though in a short span of time (he died in '67), he still left behind him a legacy of achievements worth multiple lifetimes. Some of the selected major works which are widely quoted and referred to, I have tried to list them here. 'College Yiddish: An Introduction to Yiddish Language and Jewish Life and Culture', first edition published in 1949 and the sixth edition in 1999 and it continues.

Another important master class publication which is a very original contribution by Uriel Weinreich is 'Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems' published in 1953 and it was reprinted by Mouton in 1963. Yet another groundbreaking work that appeared in 1958, 'Say it in Yiddish: A Phrasebook for Travelers', and the 'Modern Yiddish-English; English-Yiddish Dictionary' which keeps being reprinted again and again: it continues to be reprinted again and again.

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- Languages in contact, findings and problems
176 editions published between 1953 and 2010 in 3 languages
- Languages in contact : French, German and Romansch in twentieth-century Switzerland
23 editions published in 2011 in English
Based on the author's fieldwork, this title contains a detailed report on language contact in Switzerland in the first half of the 20th century, especially along the French-German linguistic border and between German and Romansh in the canton of Grisons (Graubünden)
- On semantics
19 editions published between 1979 and 2018 in English
Uriel Weinreich was one of the innovative and creative thinkers in the field of semantics in the twentieth century. This volume contains all of Weinreich's writings on semantics, including a number of papers that were not published in his lifetime. It includes the first paper on the universals of semantic theory, an analysis of fundamental concepts of semantics and semiotics and a critique of lexicography.




There are some other works that are mostly cited and I will give you little data (14:12) World Cat. We will also go through the list of major works which have a high frequency of appearance, printing and which remain a primary source of understanding. These issues in the subfields of sociolinguistics, like ‘Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems. It has 176 editions published between 1953 to 2010, so you can imagine in 3 languages, you can imagine the impact of it.

There is another book, ‘Languages in Contact: French, German and Romansch in 20th century Switzerland’, which has 23 editions published till 2011, in English. ‘On Semantics’ is another work which has 19 editions published between 1979 and 2018 in English. Uriel Weinreich was one of the most innovative and creative thinkers in the field of semantics in the 20th century. This volume contains all of Weinreich’s writings on semantics including a number of papers that were not published in his lifetime. It includes the first paper on the universals of semantic theory, an analysis of fundamental concepts of semantics and semiotics and a critique of lexicography. So, such a powerful, impactful contribution he made in the field of semantics. Then another book, ‘Modern English-Yiddish; English-Yiddish Dictionary’ we have been talking about, 2 editions of which were published in 1968 in English.


Then ‘College Yiddish’ that we just talked about, ‘An Introduction to Yiddish Language and to Jewish Life and Culture’, 104 editions published between 1960 and 1971 and 2011 in 4

languages. Again, ‘Modern English-Yiddish; Yiddish-English Dictionary’, 47 editions published between 1968 and 2012 in 4 different languages. ‘Explorations in Semantic Theory’, 30 editions published between 1966 and 2014.

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- Modern English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English dictionary
2 editions published in 1968 in English
- College Yiddish : an introduction to the Yiddish language and to Jewish life and culture
104 editions published between 1971 and 2011 in 4 languages
- Modern English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English dictionary
◦ 47 editions published between 1968 and 2012 in 4 languages
- Explorations in semantic theory
30 editions published between 1966 and 2014 in 3 languages



‘Yiddish Language and Folklore: A Selective Bibliography of Research’, 19 editions published. ‘The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Language, Folklore and Literature, Third Collection’, 19 editions published. So, if you look at his lifespan, short lifespan and tremendous achievement, Uriel Weinreich remains one of the most influential persons who influenced and shaped the discipline of sociolinguistics.


He had a great enriched intellectual exposure since his childhood because he was the first child of Max Weinreich. Max Weinreich, is the one who had Herzog and Labov as his students and even Uriel Weinreich. All his students also rose to fame and became prominent linguists all over America. Uriel Weinreich’s master class, and the masterpiece is ‘Languages in Contact’ and another one is the comprehensive dictionary, bilingual dictionary ‘Yiddish-English and English-Yiddish Dictionary’, which was published one year after his death.

These two remain the original major contribution by Uriel Weinreich. Uriel Weinreich was also instrumental in organizing this new emerging field and he worked with many leading pioneer researchers in the field to give a definite shape to the field. Languages in Contact is one of the


central themes of sociolinguistics because when languages come in contact with other languages, subsequent language changes happen, lots of borrowing happens and we witness a lot of variation in the use.

So, if you look at Uriel Weinreich's contribution, he created a fertile ground for the discipline to grow. His works are spread in multiple sub-disciplines like bilingualism, he is an early contributor to the concept and phenomena of bilingualism that we understand today.

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- [Yiddish language and folklore, a selective bibliography for research](#)
 - 19 editions published in 1959 in 3 languages
- [The field of Yiddish: studies in language, folklore, and literature. Third collection](#)
 - 19 editions published between 1965 and 2019 in English
- Ref: <http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n79081924/>



He is also an original contributor in semantics, universal semantic theory, that gives you basic understanding of the phenomena. Many primers, books and teaching resources were created by him for Yiddish. 'Yiddish College Prima' is one of the most basic fundamental textbooks that is used in Yiddish. His work in Yiddish and followed by Joshua Fishman's work in Yiddish, are primary sources and Uriel Weinreich's impact on the discipline in such a short span of time cannot be overstated.

And he was the one who created a very fertile ground for the growth of this discipline. And Languages in Contact remains the original source of understanding the phenomena and where he talks about findings and problems of Language in Contact. So, this is it for now about Uriel Weinreich and his impact in the discipline and his contribution in shaping the field of sociolinguistics.

He remains one of the solid pillars in development of sociolinguistics as a discipline. His works remain the original source of reference for understanding various phenomena he worked on and he wrote on. So, this is it for now, in this series. We will talk about William Wright; we will talk about Ellen Grimshaw and (())(22:08) who are also influencers and contributors in the development of the field in our subsequent lectures.

So, for now thank you very much. This is all about Uriel Weinreich and please explore the links I have given, you will find a variety of works and a rich trajectory of Uriel Weinreich. Stay tuned, see you in the next class. Thank you.