

Yiddish Nouns 2: Diminutives

Diminutives are very common in Yiddish, and many Yiddish nouns have two diminutive forms. The 1st diminutive of a noun meaning ‘X’ means ‘little X’. The 2nd diminutive generally means an even littler X. Diminutives – especially the 2nd diminutive – are often used as terms of endearment, meaning something like ‘dear little X’, ‘sweet little X’, or ‘cute little X’, especially when applied to people (often children) and animals. Diminutives of proper names are used as nicknames and terms of endearment.

‘o’ represents [ɔ]. ‘u’ represents [ʊ].

‘e’ represents [ɛ] when stressed and [ɐ] or [ə] when unstressed.

‘l’ after a consonant word-finally is a syllabic [l̩].

‘n’ after a consonant (other than ‘r’) word-finally or before a consonant is a syllabic [n̩].

‘ey’, ‘ay’, and ‘oy’ represent diphthongs; the letter ‘y’ in these diphthongs is not a consonant.

‘x’ represents a voiceless velar fricative [x].

‘r’ represents a voiced uvular fricative [ʁ].

‘š’ represents a voiceless palato-alveolar fricative [ʃ].

Stress is on the first syllable except in #23. Nonexistent forms are marked with *.

1. Construct a lexicon and grammar that explicitly account for all the Yiddish noun forms below. Ask yourself what is predictable and what is not.
2. The nonexistence of the forms marked with * is predictable. Make sure that your grammar contains a statement or constraint that predicts their impossibility.

	Gloss	Sg.	1 st Dimin.	2 nd Dimin.
1.	song	lid	lidl	lidele
2.	ship, boat	šif	šifl	šifele
3.	star	štern	šterndl	šternde
4.	part	teyl	teylxl	teylxele
5.	letter	briv	brivl	brivele
6.	cloud	volkn	volkndl	*
7.	window	fenster	fensterl	*
8.	warning signal	vorn	vorndl	vornde
9.	wife, woman	vayb	vaybl	vaybele
10.	leg	beyn	beyndl	beynde
11.	tower	turem	tureml	*
12.	melody	nign	nigndl	*
13.	valley	tol	tolxl	tolxele
14.	ear	oyer	oyerl	*
15.	stone	šteyn	šteyndl	šteynde
16.	Chasid	xosed	xosedl	*
17.	shawl, scarf	šal	šalxl	šalxele
18.	friend, comrade	xaver	xaverl	*
19.	bridegroom	xosn	xosndl	*
20.	horse	ferd	ferdl	ferdele
21.	notebook	heft	heftl	heftele
22.	sister	švester	švesterl	*
23.	teacher in religious school	melámed	melámedl	*
24.	matchmaker	šadxn	šadxndl	*
25.	tailor	šnayder	šnayderl	*