The role of written languages in language documentation. The case of Karaim.

The Karaim
- Karaim belongs to the Kipchak branch of Turkic
- 50-60 speakers, mainly in Lithuania
- 3 varieties: Trakai Karaim, Halich Karaim (almost extinct) and Crimean Karaim (extinct)
- Karaim are followers of Karaita Judaism

Sources of Karaim written language
Karaim Bible translations
Trakai Karaim:
- Genesis, Book of Job (T. Kowalski 1929: Karaimische Texte im Dialekt von Traki. Kraków)

Halich Karaim:
- fragments of the five books of Moses and some parts of the book of the Prophets (Zs. Olach 2013: A Halich Karaim translation of Hebrew biblical texts. Turcologia 98. Wiesbaden.)

Crimean Karaim:
- Book of Nehemiah (D. Shapira 2013: The Karaim translation of the Book of Nehemiah copied in the 17th century’s Crimea and printed in 1840/1841 at Gößeve, on the copyst of the manuscript, and some related issues. Karaita Archives 1, 133–198.)

The Karaim written language
The language of the translations of biblical texts and prayers differs significantly from the spoken Karaim varieties.
- numerous linguistic properties copied from Hebrew:
  - word order properties, e.g. inverse order in adjectival expressions: Gen. 1: 16 da yarattı tenri osal eki ol yarlıqların ollullari ‘and God created the two great lights’
  - morphosyntactic properties, e.g. copying the function of the Hebrew hypothetical particle onto the Karaim hypothetical marker in wishes and oaths: Deut. 1: 35 eger kerse kılı ərenlerde ol uspularda ol dor ol yaman ol uspu osal ol yerni ol yaxsi ‘not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land’
- but also archaic features can be observed:
  - phonetic features, e.g. preservation of the original vowel harmony in Trakai Karaim: Exod. 20: 7 antetmegir seminden Adonay tensityin ‘you shall not swear to the name of the Lord, your God’ (present-day form: Semindan ‘from the name of’)
  - morphological features, e.g. B-pluperfect forms which are not used anymore in spoken Karaim: Exod. 2: 2 buyurub edī far’oh taslama Niğe ol er ulanlarin Yišra’el’in ‘the Pharaoh had ordered to throw the sons of Israel into the Nile’

Aspects of the Karaim written language studies
- description of the language of the Crimean Karaim Bible translation focussing on the Turkic characteristics (Jankowski 1997)
- linguistic features copied from Biblical Hebrew onto Halich Karaim (Olach 2013)
- certain properties of spoken Karaim occurs because the given property is known both in Hebrew and in Slavic languages (Csató 2011)

A new project on the Song of Moses
A new project on ‘The Jewish culture and its literature among Karaim. The Song of Moses’ has been carrying out by Olach at the University of Szeged between 2014–2016. The project aims to describe the linguistic properties of the different versions and compare them with each other as well as to define the place of the Karaim Song of Moses versions in the Jewish culture. The project is supported by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Further literature