

On Slavic-influenced Syntactic Changes in Yiddish: A Parametric Account*

Asya Pereltsvaig
Independent Scholar

Slavic influence on the phonology, morphology, and lexicon of Yiddish is well-documented (Weinreich 1980, *inter alia*). In contrast, syntactic innovations triggered by contact with Slavic languages are rarely investigated. This paper examines the extension of verb-second (V2) from root clauses to embedded clauses, which was suggested to be Slavic-influenced by Weinreich (1958) and Santorini (1989, 1992). However, no satisfactory explanation has been offered in the previous literature for how Slavic languages — which lack V2 in either root or embedded clauses — could have engendered such a change in Yiddish. The key to the proposed analysis is treating (embedded) V2 not as a unitary phenomenon, but as a “constellation” of parameter values, some of which were already in place in Yiddish before Slavic languages came into the picture and the rest of which changed under the influence of Slavic.

* This research was inspired by conversations with Merlin Dorfman and Lev Stesin. I am also grateful to Olaf Koeneman and George Walkden for their invaluable guidance through the maze of comparative Germanic syntax, and to Olexa Stomachenko for a consultation about modern Ukrainian. I also thank John Bailyn, Wayles Browne, Nila Friedberg, Stephane Goyette, Matthew Jobin, Ekaterina Lyutikova, Julia McAnallen, John McWhorter, Peter Svenonius, the audience at SMircle (Stanford), FASL (NYU), and CGSW (U. of Chicago), and the anonymous reviewers at FASL and CGSW for helpful discussions, suggestions, and criticisms.

1 The History (and Geography) of Yiddish Word Order

According to Santorini (1989), the earliest Yiddish texts reveal it to be an “asymmetrical V2 language”, with V2 in root clauses but INFL-final order in embedded clauses (for convenience, finite elements are boldfaced in examples below):

- (1) ven [der vatr nurt doyts leyan **kan**]. [Early/Old Yiddish]
 if the father only German read can
 ‘...provided that the father can read German.’ [Santorini 1989: 111]

Modern Yiddish, however, is a symmetrical V2 language, exhibiting V2 in both root and embedded clauses.¹

- (2) ... oyb [oyfn veg **vet** dos yingl zen a kats]. [Yiddish]
 whether on-the way will the boy see a cat
 ‘... whether on the way the boy will see a cat’ [Santorini 1992: 597]

This is particularly true of Eastern Yiddish (the only surviving variety, as Western Yiddish is virtually extinct), while Western Yiddish never exhibited V2 in all types of embedded clauses.² Western Yiddish did develop INFL-medial structures; however, unlike in truly symmetrical V2 languages, only subjects could occupy the pre-V2 position in embedded clauses. According to Santorini (1989), Eastern Yiddish went through a stage characterized by this word order; in what follows, I refer to this stage as “Transitional Yiddish”. Thus, simplifying the picture, we can say that Yiddish started with the structures as in (1), went through a

¹ Asymmetrical V2 languages, such as German, allow V2 in some types of embedded clauses, namely those that cross-linguistically tend to exhibit root-clause phenomena (cf. Holmberg 1986, Grewendorf 1988, and Wiklund et al. 2009, *inter alia*). Crucially, Modern Yiddish allows V2 even in embedded clauses of the types that do not exhibit root-clause phenomena elsewhere (except in other symmetrical V2 languages, such as Icelandic).

² Western Yiddish is usually described as co-territorial with German(ic), and Eastern Yiddish as co-territorial with Slavic languages. This is not entirely accurate, as Czech-, Slovak-, and Sorbian-speaking lands are in the Western Yiddish zone. Eastern Yiddish is thus better described as co-territorial with Polish, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Lithuanian (and later, Russian).

stage with structures as in (3), and then Eastern Yiddish — but not Western Yiddish — developed true V2 structures as in (2).

- (3) ... dz der mensh **bidarf** nit tsu zukhn eyn mgid
 that the human needs not to seek a preacher
 ‘that people don’t need to look for a preacher’ [Santorini 1989: 123]

Two alternative hypotheses can be developed to account for the word order changes in Yiddish. According to the first hypothesis, the emergence of embedded V2, as in (2), is an instance of an endogenous change: Müller (1996) and Schönenberger (2001: 75–137) have shown that children acquiring German may *spontaneously* produce Yiddish-like structures at a certain stage of L1 acquisition. If many children make this “error” and do not ultimately recover from it, a Yiddish-style symmetrical-V2 language could emerge out of an asymmetrical-V2 language. Although this hypothesis explains how the emergence of embedded V2 *could* have happened, it does not explain *why* this development *actually* happened only in Eastern Yiddish, but not in Western Yiddish or in other West Germanic varieties (e.g. German, Dutch dialects), including German dialects spoken in Slavic-speaking lands. As Weinreich (1958: 369) notes, “the Germans either were Slavicized completely and lost their identity, or preserved a culture and language in which the Slavic factor was marginal. The Jews, on the other hand, have generally maintained their distinctness, but have undergone a Slavic cultural and linguistic influence so deep and enriching as to place them in a relation of affinity with the Slavs”. It thus appears that being Jewish and surrounded by Slavs (though not Czechs, Slovaks, or Sorbians) are both prerequisites for this diachronic development in word order. Language contact, thus, appears to be a more likely “culprit” than language-internal processes.

Weinreich (1958: 383) and Santorini (1989: 155–157) have both noted that linguistic contact must be at play in the emergence of embedded V2 in Eastern Yiddish; however, neither has developed a full-fledged analysis that shows how contact with Slavic languages, lacking V2 in both root and embedded clauses, might have engendered this change in Yiddish. In this paper, I do just that. Specifically, two issues that have not been resolved conclusively in the previous literature are addressed here: first, what exactly is the nature of the change in Yiddish

(in parametric terms: which parameter values have been reset); and second, what structures and in which Slavic language(s) are evidence that these languages indeed had the appropriate parameter settings to induce this change in Yiddish.

2 Verb-Second in a Parametric System

For the purposes of this paper, I assume a classical analysis of asymmetrical V2 as having the finite verb in C° and the “first constituent” in Spec-CP (cf. den Besten 1983). Symmetrical V2 languages are usually treated in the literature as having the same configuration, but lower in the structure. Here I adopt the analysis proposed by Santorini (1989) and Diesing (1990), whereby the finite verb is in T° and the “first constituent” is in Spec-TP (see Heycock and Santorini 1993 for arguments against adopting the “CP-recursion” alternative of Holmberg 1986 for Yiddish).

I propose that in order to obtain such a configuration, five binary parameters must each be set a certain way: (i) CP should not be involved in building a root declarative clause (as it is in an asymmetrical V2 language), (ii) the finite verb should raise to T° (cf. Pollock 1989), (iii) the TP must be left-headed, (iv) the subjects must be able to stay below TP (i.e. Nominative Case should be checked by T° downwards), and (v) some phrasal element (but not necessarily the subject) must raise into Spec-TP (i.e. EPP). The parameter space is represented in Table 1 below.³

This parametric system is based on the system proposed by Bailyn (2004), but involves several modifications. First, the Weak NOM Case parameter, which controls whether the subject can stay below T° , is defined here for all languages and not just the ones with the “TP” Tense domain setting. Second, the Directionality of TP parameter is added to account for the contrast between INFL-medial and INFL-final languages. The third, and biggest, departure from Bailyn’s system concerns the treatment of V-to-T raising and movement into Spec-TP. In Bailyn’s

³ For the sake of presentation, I am assuming that INFL-final structures are merged as right-headed, ignoring Kayne’s (1994) LCA. I am also setting aside the OV-to-VO change in Yiddish, which some say to be related to the emergence of embedded V2. However, under the analysis proposed here, being VO is not a pre-requisite for being a symmetrical V2 language.

system, each of these descriptive contrasts is involved in two distinct parameters, and the two movements (into T° and into Spec-TP) are related by the $\text{Nom} = [+T]$ parameter, which forces V-to-T raising but only if the nominative subject in Spec-TP cannot check the $[+T]$ feature of T° . In other words, whether the verb raises to T° is controlled in Bailyn's system by a disjunctive set of two parameters: raising occurs if the Kind of EPP is set as "X" or if the $\text{Nom} = [+T]$ parameter is set as "-". In the system proposed here, V-to-T raising is controlled by a separate parameter (as proposed by Pollock 1989) and is not linked to movement to Spec-TP. The main reason for this departure is the fact that in Russian Generalized Inversion clauses, analyzed by Bailyn (2004), V-to-T raising is actually not forced by the lack of a nominative subject in Spec-TP, contrary to his claims. The relevant data is given in (4) below: the verb follows rather than precedes the relevant types of adverbs (cf. Pollock 1989). Moreover, a search in the National Corpus of Russian brings up numerous examples of the format in (4b) and no examples as in (4a). (See also Kallestinova 2007: 130, Slioussar 2011.)

Table 1. Proposed parametric system

Tense domain	V-to-T Raising	Directionality of TP	Weak NOM Case	EPP on T°	Languages
TP	-	L	-	+	English
TP	+	L	-	+	French
TP	+	L	+	+	Icelandic, Modern Yiddish
TP	-	L	+	+	Russian
TP	+	L	-	-	Spanish, Italian
TP	+	L	+	-	Irish
CP	-	L	-	-	Welsh
CP	-	L	-	+	Mainland Scandinavian
CP	+	R	?	+	German, Early Yiddish
CP	+	L	-	+	Transitional

					Yiddish
(4) a.	* UVani	byvali	často	takie	problemy.
		at Vanya	were	often	such problems _{NOM}
b.	UVani	často	byvali	takie	problemy.
		at Vanya	often	were	such problems _{NOM}
					‘Vanya often had such problems.’

Another point worth noting is that V-to-T-to-C movement in asymmetrical V2 languages is not conditional on independent V-to-T raising. Thus, some of the languages with a “CP” Tense domain (i.e. with V-to-T-to-C movement in main clauses) do not have V-to-T raising in embedded clauses (i.e. in the absence of a subsequent movement to C°); this is true of Mainland Scandinavian languages (cf. Taraldsen 1986: 8, Heycock et al. 2010: 62, and Platzack 1986: 28 for Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish examples, respectively) and Welsh (cf. Borsley 2006: 473). Yet, other languages with a “CP” Tense domain (i.e. with V-to-T-to-C movement in main clauses) do exhibit V-to-T raising in embedded clauses (i.e. with no subsequent movement to C°); for example, Eastern Yiddish in its transitional stage (and Western Yiddish in its final stage) did have V-to-T raising even in the absence of a subsequent movement to C°. This can be seen from the example in (3) above, where the finite verb *bidarf* ‘needs’ precedes rather than follows the negation marker *nit* ‘not’.⁴ Consequently, the V-to-T Raising parameter is defined for all languages, regardless of the setting of the Tense Domain parameter (in contrast to Bailyn’s (2004) system).

According to my system, there were two phases in the history of Yiddish word order: the first change, which occurred in both Western and Eastern Yiddish, involved the resetting the Directionality of TP parameter from right- to left-headed; the second set of changes, which affected only Eastern Yiddish, involved a change in the Tense domain from “CP” to “TP” and a change in the setting of the Weak NOM Case parameter that now allowed subjects to stay low. (This description is a simplification of the actual diachronic picture, as the two phases were overlapping in time rather than strictly consecutive.)

⁴ Santorini (1989: 119–121) shows that beside negation, V-to-T movement in these forms of Yiddish can be diagnosed by particles and *Loshn koydesh* compounds (i.e. Hebrew nominal elements of light verb constructions).

Under this model, Yiddish-before-Slavs (*aka* “Transitional Yiddish”) was still an asymmetrical V2 language, with V-to-T raising and Subject-to-Spec-TP raising in embedded clauses. In effect, it had the same V2-in-CP structure for root clauses as in modern German and the same structure for embedded clauses (V-in-T and subject necessarily in Spec-TP) as in modern French. Crucially, Transitional Yiddish already had some of the parameter settings that produce the embedded-V2 syntax: the V-to-T raising and EPP-on-T^o parameters were both set as “+” and the Directionality of TP parameter was set as “L”. All in all, of the five parameters considered here, two already had the same settings in Transitional Yiddish as in Slavic languages and so remained unchanged, two changed their settings as a result of contact, and one (V-to-T Raising) remained unaffected by contact. (Why the latter parameter was not reset through contact is an interesting question, which, unfortunately, space limitations do not allow me to consider in detail.) In the next section, I consider whether the resetting of the Tense domain and Weak NOM Case parameters can be attributed to Slavic languages in contact with Yiddish.

3 Diachrony of Slavic Word Order

As noted in Table 1, Russian has the appropriate settings for the Tense domain and Weak NOM case parameters to trigger the relevant changes in Eastern Yiddish. However, contact with (modern) Russian came too late to engender the emergence of embedded V2 in Eastern Yiddish: the contact began no earlier than the late 1700s, whereas the first attestations of truly V2 embedded clauses (i.e. clauses with a non-subject “first constituent”) in Eastern Yiddish manuscripts date from 1590s–1600s (Santorini 1989: 155), around the same time that Yiddish texts from Eastern Europe started exhibiting specifically Eastern Yiddish features in lexicon and phonology. It should be noted, however, that the corresponding changes in *spoken* Eastern Yiddish might have predated those first attestations in manuscripts by as long as several centuries, a period during which Yiddish-speaking Jews used Western Yiddish as their written standard in the Eastern dialectal zone as well as in the Western one. Thus, it is possible that these contact-influenced changes remained “under the radar” (i.e. not reflected in manuscripts) for centuries (cf. McWhorter 2008 on Celtic influence on English).

Therefore, 1590s–1600s is *terminus ante quem* for the change in spoken Eastern Yiddish. In order to find a Slavic “culprit”, we must examine Slavic languages that were in contact with Yiddish in the Eastern zone prior to 1590, perhaps as early as 1300s (if not before). At the time, speakers of Eastern Yiddish were in contact with speakers of Polish, Ukrainian, or Belarusian.⁵ First Jewish communities in what was to become the “Pale of Settlement” (eastern Poland, Ukraine, Belarus) date from as early as 1128 CE (Hrodno, present-day Belarus); Ashkenazi Jewish communities in Lviv (Lemberg) and Lutsk (both in present-day western Ukraine) were established by 1256 CE and 1430 CE, respectively (Spolsky 2014: 181). More generally, Brook (1999: 282) writes: “[Ashkenazy] Jews arrived in Poland in large numbers starting in the mid-thirteenth century, and in Belarus by the late fourteenth century”.

From the preceding discussion one thing is clear: if the emergence of embedded V2 in Eastern Yiddish is to be explained by contact with Slavic languages, it is the settings of the Tense domain and Weak NOM case parameters in pre-1590 Polish, Ukrainian, and Belarusian that we should establish. If we find that these languages had the “TP” Tense domain and the “+” setting for the Weak NOM case parameters in the relevant period, it can be claimed that these parameter settings were transferred to Eastern Yiddish (more on the mechanisms of parameter setting transfer in the following section).

The task, however, is not as simple as it seems, as there is little discussion in the existing literature on the parameter settings (or more generally, word order patterns) in medieval Slavic languages. Nevertheless, a number of syntactic constructions that manifest the relevant parameter settings can be found in relevant languages in the relevant time period. These constructions can be characterized as follows: (i) they are embeddable, without changes in word order, (ii) they exhibit the XP-V-NOM format (even in default, out-of-the-blue contexts), which Bailyn (2004) refers to “Generalized Inversion”, and (iii) their diachronic development is relatively well-understood. While Bailyn lists a number of such Generalized Inversion structures, including OVS clauses, locative inversion, and more, some of these structures are

⁵ Also Lithuanian; however, since little is known about the complex Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian triglossia in the relevant period or the diachronic development of major constituent order in Lithuanian, I am leaving this issue for future research.

difficult to work with in the diachronic dimension: for example, OVS clauses can be derived not only via Generalized Inversion but also via Topicalization (A'-movement) of the object and post-posing of the subject; little is known about the diachronic development of the other structures. The one structure that fits the entire description above, including (iii), is the so-called predicative possessive construction (PPC). The diachronic development of these constructions in West and East Slavic is discussed in detail in McAnallen 2011.

According to McAnallen (2011), the earliest attested form of Slavic had three types of PPCs: a *have*-PPC, familiar from English and modern West Slavic languages, and two oblique PPCs characterized by the possessor expressed by a PP headed by *u* 'at' or by a dative noun phrase, while the possessum is expressed by a post-verbal nominative noun phrase. The two oblique PPCs, relevant to the discussion here, are illustrated below:⁶

- (5) *u*-PPC (Old Russian, from *Primary Chronicle*; cited in McAnallen 2011: 53-54)

ona že reče imъ nyně, ou vasъ něs medu ni
 she_{NOM} PART said to.them now at you not.is honey nor
 skory

fur

'She said to them that now you have neither honey nor fur...'

- (6) dative-PPC (Old Czech, from *Život Svaté Kateřiny*; cited in McAnallen 2011: 32)

neb mu biěše dci jediná
 for him_{DAT} was daughter_{NOM} one_{NOM}

'...for he had one daughter'

The oblique PPCs thus have the required XP-V-NOM format (where the XP is either an *u*-PP or a dative noun phrase); moreover, they were (and still are) embeddable in that format as well (for examples from the older forms of West and East Slavic languages, the reader is referred to McAnallen 2011). Finally, McAnallen argues that the diachronic development of these constructions in West and East Slavic receives a

⁶ In example (5) in the main text, the post-verbal possessum is in the genitive triggered by the clausal negation (*aka* the Genitive of Negation).

contact-based account: West Slavic lost the oblique PPCs (particularly, McAnallen discusses the loss of the dative PPC in the history of Czech) under the influence of German, whereas East Slavic moved toward the *u*-PPC under the influence of Finnic languages (the dative PPC was completely lost and the *have*-PPC has become limited in its application).

Given the distinct trajectories in the history of oblique PPCs in West and East Slavic, let's consider each language group separately, starting with West Slavic. Polish, which was the West Slavic language in contact with Yiddish in the Eastern zone, descended from Common Slavic, which had both types of oblique PPCs; modern Polish, however, is a *have*-language. The crucial question is when the oblique PPCs were lost in the history of Polish. Unfortunately, McAnallen's discussion focuses on Czech; she claims that Czech lost its dative PPC in the first half of the 15th century (dative PPC is still attested in texts from 1360s, but gone by 1450s). Assuming that the loss of oblique PPCs in Polish dates from roughly the same period or later — a safe assumption if it was induced by contact with German, as McAnallen claims — Ashkenazi Jewish communities have lived side by side with Polish speakers for over 200 years before the loss of oblique PPCs, reasonably long enough for the contact-induced change to take place in spoken Eastern Yiddish. (Further research is needed to verify with more precision when oblique PPCs disappeared in Polish in favor of the *have*-PPC.)

Let's now consider PPCs in East Slavic languages. Like Common Slavic, Old Russian — the ancestor of not only Russian, but Ukrainian and Belarusian as well — had all three types of PPCs: *have*-PPC, *u*-PPC, and dative PPC. The attestation of the three types of PPCs in various kinds of Old Russian texts, from McAnallen (2011: 52-64), is summarized in Table 2 below. As can be seen from the Table, the frequency of the oblique PPCs increased over time, as one moves further north, and in more colloquial texts. Importantly, oblique PPCs are also found, with varying frequency, in texts from different Old Russian regions, including those from the southwest (present-day Ukraine). (There are, unfortunately, no quantitative data specifically for texts from that region; hence, they are not included in the Table below.)

Table 2. Distribution of different types of PPCs in Old Russian

Texts	HAVE	<i>u</i> -PPC	dative-PPC
Primary Chronicle ⁷	70%	12%	17%
Moscow Chronicle (late 1400s)	51%	17%	33%
<i>Russian Pravda</i> (legal code)	--	75%	25%
<i>Sudebnik</i> of 1497	--	100%	--
Birch bark documents from Old Novgorod (different dates)	8%	65%	27%

As for modern Ukrainian and Belarusian, both retained the *u*-PPC. In Belarusian, the *u*-PPC is the primary way to express the broadest range of “possession” relations (cf. Mazzitelli 2012: 132). Moreover, she also notes (p. 146) that although the exact distribution of the various PPCs in Old Belarusian is not entirely clear, both the *u*-PPC and the dative PPC were present in the language at that stage as well. As for modern Ukrainian, it has both the *have*-PPC and the *u*-PPC, with the former more commonly found in western dialects and the latter in eastern dialects. One possibility is that Ukrainian continuously had the *u*-PPC, from Old Russian to Old Ukrainian to modern Ukrainian, with the *have*-PPC being a later Polish-derived innovation. However, McAnallen (2011: 105) suggests an alternative possibility, which needs to be considered until solid data is available to refute it: namely, that Ukrainian lost the *u*-PPC under the influence of Polish at some point in its development and later reacquired it under the influence of Russian. However, even if the latter scenario took place, I believe that the (temporary) loss of the *u*-PPC under the influence of Polish would come too late to “bleed” the contact-induced resetting of the relevant parameters in Eastern Yiddish (recall from above that Ashkenazi Jewish communities lived in Lviv and elsewhere in Ukrainian-speaking lands as early as the mid-13th century).

While a more detailed analysis of the older forms of Polish, Ukrainian, and Belarusian would help firm up the dates at which oblique PPCs were lost in those languages, it is plausible that Ashkenazi Jews speaking Eastern Yiddish lived side by side with speakers of Slavic that expressed predicative possession via one of two oblique PPCs, which

⁷ The Primary Chronicle was composed between 1110 CE and 1118 CE, but the oldest extant manuscript is the Laurentian Codex dating from 1377 CE. The *Russian Pravda* was composed in the early 1000s.

reveal to us linguists that the settings of the Tense domain and Weak NOM case parameters in those languages were appropriate to cause the relevant changes in Eastern Yiddish. But how can parameter settings be transferred from one language into another? The following section addresses that question.

4 How Can Parameter Settings Be “Borrowed”?

The existing literature on language contact stresses time and again that syntactic structures are the least easily borrowable elements of language (cf. Moravcsik 1978, Thomason and Kaufman 1988, Matras 2000, *inter alia*). So how can parameter settings be “borrowed”? Van Coetsem (1988, 2000), Thomason & Kaufman (1988), Louden (2000), and Lucas (2012) distinguish two types of inter-linguistic transfer: (i) borrowing proper, initiated by the speakers of the recipient language, and (ii) imposition, or interference through shift, which is initiated by speakers of the source language who shift to the recipient language as their L2. Louden (2000: 95) recaps: “In situations of borrowing... the structures which are most susceptible to transfer... are lexical, while structures from more stable domains of language, notably phonology and inflectional morphology, are less likely to be borrowed. On the other hand, in situations of... interference through shift..., when native speakers of a source language are acquiring a recipient language, it is predicted that the more stable domains... will be more readily affected”. Louden discusses contact-induced phonological changes (in Eastern Yiddish as well, as it happens). In this paper, I propose that syntax is another domain of language that is subject to interference through shift rather than borrowing proper, contrary to Lucas’ (2012) claims that some syntactic phenomena may be borrowed (e.g. *dos*-clefts in Yiddish from Slavic). The main reason why Lucas attributes the emergence of *dos*-clefts in Yiddish to borrowing rather than interference through shift is because he could not find a group who might have undergone a language shift, from Slavic to Yiddish. Instead of abandoning the position that syntax is not borrowable but can only be transferred via interference through shift (well-motivated in the literature, see references above), I propose to look harder for a group that might be “to blame” for such interference. Interference through shift in the case of Slavic-Yiddish contact, as schematized in Figure 1 below, involves some speakers of

Slavic as L1 switching to Yiddish (L2) and then their way of speaking (Eastern) Yiddish spreading across the broader linguistic community:

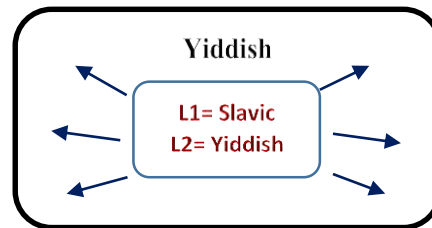


Fig. 1: Speakers' acceptance of case/number forms

Louden (2000) proposes that the group in question were the so-called Knaanic Jews, that is Slavic-speaking non-Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern European origin, possibly descendants of the Khazars who maintained their Judaism, but shifted from a Turkic to Slavic language. Similarly, Weinreich (1958: 410) suggested Knaanic influence on Eastern Yiddish: "...where Yiddish-speaking Jews found settled fellow Jews speaking Slavic languages, as they did in Bohemia and in Russia, they experienced a smoother contact with Slavic than was ever possible across the Jewish-Christian religious barrier". Knaanic Jews are broadly discussed in the historical literature (cf. Ausubel 1953: 133, Samuel 1971: 29, Koestler 1976, Birnbaum 1981: 222–225, Grayzel 1984: 388, Harshav 1990: 5–6, Brook 1999: 302, Spolsky 2014: 158, 171–177, *inter alia*). However, historical indications of a massive presence of Knaanic Jews in Kievan Rus' after 1240 CE, when Kiev was sacked by the Golden Horde and its Jewish Quarter was destroyed, are "frustratingly few..." (Weinreich 1958: 410). Hence, whatever Knaanic Jews might have resided in Kievan Rus' in the early period, they hardly had much opportunity for extensive and prolonged contact with Ashkenazi Jewish communities resettling from the West. Moreover, evidence of Knaanic presence as far north and west as present-day Poland is virtually nil. Genetic evidence also indicates that Knaanic admixture into Ashkenazi Jewish communities was fairly minor: at most 12% of male Ashkenazi Jews trace descent to such Knaanic Jews (Nebel et al. 2005, *inter alia*). Nor were Knaanic Jews a socially prestigious group within the larger (mostly Ashkenazi) Jewish communities. Historical literature is full of mentions of the socially inferior status of Knaanic Jews (wherever and whenever they

were found), their “primitive Judaism”; for example, Samuel (1971: 29) writes about “the cultural backwardness of early Russian Jewry. It had no schools of its own and set its young men to the west, to France and Germany, to obtain a Jewish education...” All in all, it is not likely that Knaanic Jews were the agents of interference through shift.

An alternative possibility, not considered much in the existing literature, is that the interference through shift was a result of frequent intermarriage of Ashkenazi Jews with non-Jewish Slavs. Recent work by Forster and Renfrew (2011) established a pattern whereby language in gender-biased mixed communities correlates better with Y-DNA (passed down along paternal line) than mtDNA (passed down along maternal line). Typically, such communities come about when men invading/settling from elsewhere marry local women; the resulting communities end up speaking the language of the men. For example, Slavic-speaking men settled in northern Russia and intermarried with the local Finnic-speaking women; as a result, many of the Finnic languages in the region have become extinct (e.g. Merya, Meshchera, and Murom). However, unnoticed by Forster and Renfrew is another generalization: the language that correlates with mtDNA does not disappear without a trace; instead, its grammatical influences are observable in the language of the resulting mixed community. For example, Finnic influences on Russian are discussed in Grenoble (2010), McAnallen (2011), *inter alia*. Both the survival of the “Y-DNA language” and the grammatical influences of the “mtDNA language” are illustrated also by gender-biased mixed communities in coastal Papua New Guinea, where Austronesian men intermarried with Papuan women and the resulting communities speak Austronesian languages that exhibit elements of Papuan substrate (e.g. the Magori language).

Here, I propose that the emergence of embedded V2 in Eastern Yiddish was due to interference through shift by Slavic-speaking women who married into Ashkenazi Jewish communities, adopting both Judaism and Yiddish. Some historians entertain the possibility of relatively common intermarriage with gentile women to explain the so-called “Ashkenazi demographic puzzle” (cf. King 2012): there were too few Ashkenazi Jews in the Germanic-speaking lands (80,000 in 1500 CE) to produce the numbers reported later in the east (500,000 in Poland in mid-1600s; cited from Dubnow 1967). This problem, however, remains hotly debated among historians, particularly because of some scholars’

ideological preconceptions. Perhaps in this instance linguistics can shed a new light on a controversial historical issue.

Additional support for this “interference through shift by mothers” hypothesis comes from L1 acquisition data. Macro-parameters such as the ones involved in the embedded V2 phenomenon are acquired relatively early: for example, the Weak NOM Case parameter is acquired around 24 months (Deprez & Pierce 1993, Baker 2001). The age of acquisition of the Tense Domain parameter is more controversial: some evidence suggests that children acquiring German and Swiss German use the correct patterns for embedded clauses as soon as such clauses emerge in production (3–4 years old), but other studies show that children acquiring Swiss German struggle with this aspect of the grammar till the age of 5 or even 6;3 (see Clahsen & Smolka 1986, Schönenberger 2001: 49–156, and references cited therein). If Lightfoot (1989: 321) is correct that “everything can be learned from simple, unembedded ‘domains’” and “children do not need access to more complex structures”, it is possible that the Tense Domain parameter is set even earlier than the appearance of the first embedded clauses in production.

Note also that women who transferred their native Slavic patterns (here, parameter settings) into Eastern Yiddish had ample opportunity to affect the L1 acquisition by the next generation of Yiddish speakers because small children in the process of setting the relevant parameters spent more time with mothers (and more generally, womenfolk) than the male members of the community, as evidenced by Talmudic commentaries and rabbinical *responsa* literature which *assumes* that “the demands of children and home chores dictate a woman’s ‘time-table’” (Biale 1984: 12-13) and hence exempts women from time-bound positive *mitzvot* (i.e. commandments that require one to do something at a particular time, which are “incumbent upon men only”). Thus, children acquiring Eastern Yiddish had more exposure to women’s form of Yiddish, sprinkled with grammatical elements from Slavic.⁸

⁸ A potential objection can be raised that not much trace has been found of such a massive intermarriage-cum-conversion of non-Jewish women into the Eastern European Ashkenazi Jewish community in the gene pool (see Thomas *et al.* 2002, Behar *et al.* 2006, Costa *et al.* 2013). However, mtDNA may have a wrong “temporal resolution” to adequately represent a relatively recent admixture such as this. I thank Ora Matushansky and Matthew Jobin for discussing this issue.

5 Conclusions

In this paper, I have developed an analysis of the diachronic emergence of embedded V2 in the syntax of Eastern Yiddish as a result of interference through shift by Slavic-speaking women who married into the Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jewish communities.⁹ I have argued that the development of true embedded V2 structures (with non-subject in the preverbal position) in the history of Yiddish can be reduced to resetting of two parameters: the Tense domain and the Weak NOM case parameters. Plausibly, relevant Slavic languages (primarily Polish, Ukrainian, and Belarusian) had two oblique PPCs that manifest the settings of these two parameters in clear, unambiguous form. L1 speakers of Slavic (by hypothesis, primarily women) transferred the settings of these parameters into Eastern Yiddish, and the next generations of children acquiring Eastern Yiddish as their L1 were predominantly exposed to this “Slavic-flavored” variety of Yiddish. To summarize, the embedded V2 syntax of modern Eastern Yiddish can be described as “Germanic syntax tweaked under the influence of Slavic”. However, the diachronic development of Yiddish word order cannot be accounted as endogenous change or, as Wexler (1993) claimed it to be, “a form of the West Slavic language Sorbian which became re-lexified to High German” (cf. Wexler 2002, Beider 2014).

References

- Ausubel, Nathan. 1953. *Pictorial History of the Jewish People*. New York: Crown.
- Bailyn, John F. 2004. Generalized Inversion. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 22(1): 1–50.
- Baker, Mark C. 2001. *The Atoms of Language*. Basic Books.

⁹ It is possible that the emergence of embedded V2 in Icelandic, another symmetrical V2 language, is also a contact-induced development, an instance of “interference through shift by mothers” speaking Irish as their L1 rather than Old Norse/Old Icelandic. Genetic studies (see Goodacre et al. 2005) show that while most of modern Icelanders’ Y-DNA traces back to Norsemen, mtDNA hails chiefly from Ireland. I leave this issue for further research.

- Behar, Doron M., Ene Metspalu, Toomas Kivisild, Alessandro Achilli, Yarin Hadid, Shay Tzur, Luísa Pereira, Antonio Amorim, Lluís Quintana-Murci, Kari Majamaa, Corinna Herrnstadt, Neil Howell, Oleg Balanovsky, Ildus Kutuev, Andrey Pshenichnov, David Gurwitz, Batsheva Bonne-Tamir, Antonio Torroni, Richard Villems, Karl Skorecki. 2006. The Matrilineal Ancestry of Ashkenazi Jewry: Portrait of a Recent Founder Event. *American Journal of Human Genetics* 78(3): 487–497.
- Beider, Alexander. 2014. Unity of the German component of Yiddish: myth or reality? *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 226: 101–136.
- Besten, Hans den. 1983. The Interaction of Root Transformations and Lexical Deletive Rules. In: Werner Abraham (ed.) *On the Formal Syntax of Westgermania*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. Pp. 47–131.
- Biale, Rachel. 1984. *Women and Jewish Law*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Birnbaum, Henrik. 1981. On Jewish Life and Anti-Jewish Sentiments in Medieval Russia. In: Henrik Birnbaum (ed.) *Essays in Early Slavic Civilization*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink.
- Borsley, Robert D. 2006. On the nature of Welsh VSO clauses. *Lingua* 116(4): 462–490.
- Brook, Kevin Alan. 1999. *The Jews of Khazaria*. Northvale, NJ/Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc.
- Clahsen, Harold and Klaus-Dirk Smolka. 1986. Psycholinguistic Evidence. In: Hubert Haider & Martin Prinzhorn (eds.) *Verb Second Phenomena in Germanic Languages*. Dordrecht: Foris. Pp. 137–168.
- Costa, Marta D.; Joana B. Pereira, Maria Pala, Verónica Fernandes, Anna Olivieri, Alessandro Achilli, Ugo A. Perego, Sergei Rychkov, Oksana Naumova, Jiří Hatina, Scott R. Woodward, Ken Khong Eng, Vincent Macaulay, Martin Carr, Pedro Soares, Luísa Pereira & Martin B. Richards. 2013. A substantial prehistoric European ancestry amongst Ashkenazi maternal lineages. *Nature Communications* 4: 2543.
- Deprez, Vivian & Alan Pierce. 1993. Negation and functional projections in early child grammar. *Linguistic Inquiry* 24: 25–68.
- Diesing, Molly. 1990. Verb Movement and the Subject Position in Yiddish. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 8: 41–79.

- Dubnow, Simon. 1967. *History of the Jews: From the Beginning to Early Christianity*. New York: Yoseloff.
- Forster, Peter and Colin Renfrew. 2011. Mother Tongue and Y Chromosomes. *Science* 333 (6048): 1390.
- Goodacre, Sarah; Agnar Helgason, Jayne Nicholson, Lorraine Southam, L. Ferguson, Eileen Hickey, Emilce Vega, Kari Stefánsson, Ryk Ward & Bryan Sykes. 2005. Genetic evidence for a family-based Scandinavian settlement of Shetland and Orkney during the Viking periods. *Heredity* 95: 129–135.
- Grayzel, Solomon. 1984. *A History of the Jews*. New York: Meridian.
- Grenoble, Lenore A. 2010. Contact and the Development of the Slavic Languages. In: Raymond Hickey (ed.) *The Handbook of Language Contact*. Wiley-Blackwell. Pp. 581–597.
- Grewendorf, Günther. 1988. *Aspekte der deutschen Syntax*. Tübingen: Narr.
- Harshav, Benjamin. 1990. *The Meaning of Yiddish*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Heycock, Caroline and Beatrice Santorini. 1993. Head Movement and the Licensing of Non-Thematic Positions. In: Jonathan Mead (ed.) *The Proceedings of WCCFL 11*. Stanford: CSLI Publications. Pp. 262–276.
- Heycock, Caroline; Antonella Sorace, and Zakaris Svabo Hansen. 2010. V-to-I and V2 in subordinate clauses: an investigation of Faroese in relation to Icelandic and Danish. *The Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 13(1): 61–97.
- Holmberg, Anders. 1986. *Word Order and Syntactic Features in the Scandinavian Languages and English*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Stockholm.
- Kallestinova, Elena. 2007. *Aspects of word order in Russian*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa.
- Kayne, Richard S. 1994. *The Antisymmetry of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- King, Robert D. 2012. Were Polish Jews displaced Germans? *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 45: 161–164.
- Koestler, Arthur. 1976. *The Thirteenth Tribe: The Khazar Empire and Its Heritage*. New York: Random House.

- Lightfoot, David. 1989. The child's trigger experience: Degree-0 learnability. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 12(2): 321–334.
- Louden, Mark L. 2000. Contact-Induced Phonological Change in Yiddish: Another Look at Weinreich's Riddles. *Diachronica* 27(1): 85–110.
- Lucas, Christopher. 2012. Contact-induced grammatical change. Towards an explicit account. *Diachronica* 29(3): 275–300.
- Matras, Yaron. 2000. How predictable is contact-induced change in grammar? In: Colin Renfrew, April McMahon, and Larry Trask (eds.) *Time depth in historical linguistics*. Cambridge, UK: McDonald Institute for Archeological Research. Pp. 563–583.
- Mazzitelli, Lidia Federica. 2012. *The expression of predicative Possession in Belarusian and Lithuanian*. Ph.D. dissertation, Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza".
- McAnallen, Julia. 2011. *The History of Predicative Possession in Slavic: Internal Development vs. Language Contact*. PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.
- McWhorter, John. 2008. *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold History of English*. Gotham Press.
- Moravcsik, Edith. 1978. Universals of language contact. In: Joseph H. Greenberg (ed.) *Universals of Human Language*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Pp. 94–122.
- Müller, Natascha. 1996. V2 in first-language acquisition: early child grammars fall within the range of universal grammar. *Linguistics* 34: 993–1028.
- Nebel, Almut; Dvora Filon, Marina Faerman, Himla Soodyall, Ariella Oppenheim. 2005. Y chromosome evidence for a founder effect in Ashkenazi Jews. *European Journal of Human Genetics* 13: 388–391.
- Platzack, Christer. 1986. The Position of the Finite Verb in Swedish. In: Hubert Haider & Martin Prinzhorn (eds.) *Verb Second Phenomena in Germanic Languages*. Dordrecht: Foris. Pp. 27–48.
- Pollock, Jean-Yves. 1989. Verb Movement, Universal Grammar, and the Structure of IP. *Linguistic Inquiry* 20(3): 365–424.
- Samuel, Maurice. 1971. *In Praise of Yiddish*. New York: Cowles.
- Santorini, Beatrice. 1989. *The Generalization of the Verb-Second Constraint in the History of Yiddish*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

- Santorini, Beatrice. 1992. Variation and Change in Yiddish Subordinate Clause Word Order. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 10: 595–640.
- Schönenberger, Manuela. 2001. *Embedded V-to-C in Child Grammar: The Acquisition of Verb Placement in Swiss German*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Slioussar, Natalia. 2011. Russian and the EPP Requirement in the Tense Domain. *Lingua* 121(14): 2048–2068.
- Spolsky, Bernard. 2014. *The Languages of the Jews. A Sociolinguistic History*. Cambridge University Press.
- Taraldsen, Knut Tarald. 1986. On Verb Second and the Functional Content of Syntactic Categories. In: Hubert Haider & Martin Prinzhorn (eds.) *Verb Second Phenomena in Germanic Languages*. Dordrecht: Foris. Pp. 7–26.
- Thomason, Sarah G. and Terence Kaufman. 1988. *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Van Coetsem, Frans C. 1988. *Loan Phonology and the Two Transfer Types in Language Contact*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Van Coetsem, Frans C. 2000. *A General and Unified Theory of the Transmission Process in Language Contact*. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Weinreich, Max. 1980. *History of the Yiddish Language*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Weinreich, Uriel. 1958. Yiddish and Colonial German in Eastern Europe: The Differential Impact of Slavic. In: *American Contributions to the Fourth International Congress of Slavicists* (Moscow, September 1958). The Hague: Mouton & Co. Pp. 369–421.
- Wexler, Paul. 1993. *The Ashkenazic Jews*. Columbus, OH: Slavica.
- Wexler, Paul (2002) *Two-tiered Relexification in Yiddish. Jews, Sorbs, Khazars, and the Kiev-Poessian Dialects*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Wiklund, Anna-Lena; Kristine Bentzen, Gunnar Hrafn Hrafnbjargarson, & Þorbjörg Hróarsdóttir. 2009. On the distribution and illocution of V2 in Scandinavian that-clauses. *Lingua* 119(12): 1914–1938.