

## Guest Editors' Preface

What makes Yiddish so special that it warrants a special issue? Measured by its number of speakers past and present, Yiddish is one of the most neglected Germanic languages. It is often treated as a minority ethnolect or a “mixed language” between Germanic, Slavic, Hebrew-Aramaic, and Romance. However, in its core Yiddish is undeniably a Germanic language with its own structures and varieties. The field of Yiddish linguistics is small, but it is dynamic.

The dynamics of Yiddish linguistics became particularly evident to us and to the contributors of this special issue at the conference *Yiddish Language Structures* held at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf in June 2019. At this conference, a range of linguistic papers were presented by both emerging scholars and established academics. This conference gave us the impetus to send a signal to the community of Germanic linguistics. Exemplifying the diversity of Yiddish linguistics, this special issue brings together four excellent articles on very different topics.

Yiddish is at present one of the fastest growing Germanic languages. Furthermore, in the *Haredi* (ultra-orthodox) communities, new dialects have recently emerged. It offers a unique opportunity for linguists to measure and analyze the mechanisms and structures of current language change and contact situations of a socially very special and highly interesting speech community. Two examples of studies dealing with these young varieties are the contributions of Assouline and Belk et al.

The historical stages of the Yiddish language, however, are no less remarkable considering the various migrations, and language and cultural contacts. In Fleischer's paper, for example, one sees that the historical dialects of the early 20th century represent a closed linguistic diasystem; the dialect areas within this system exhibit syntactic variation, which, to some extent, appears to be a reflex of the different contact languages.

Yiddish has been of special interest for theoretical linguistics (often with a generative approach) at least since Waletzky 1980 and Davis & Prince 1986. In this tradition, Diesing & Santorini demonstrate that the study of Yiddish has not been exhausted yet, and that its symmetrical V2, in particular, provides insights into basic mechanisms of the structure of the language. Yiddish is much stricter in the use of embedded V2 than other (Germanic) languages with symmetric V2, such as Icelandic. Based on data from the *Penn Parsed Corpus of Yiddish* and interviews with

native speakers, Diesing & Santorini discuss constraints on the extraction from embedded V2 clauses. They show that the constraints behind extraction evoke *wh*-islands and, remarkably, make the extraction from nonphasal complementizerless declaratives illicit. They thereby illustrate the interaction of two important minimality effects: T-to-C movement and Spec-to-Spec antilocality (Erlewine 2020).

The paper by Fleischer also deals with the formal aspect and dialectal structure of embedding. Based on three translation tasks using data from the *Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry*, Fleischer illustrates that the use of a resumptive pronoun within a relative clause is strongly geographically determined. Furthermore, he discusses the possible influence of the different contact languages, showing that the formal similarity is not a structural one.

Belk et al. also discuss and ultimately reject the influence of contact languages. The authors present the results from their recent project on contemporary Hasidic Yiddish, that is, Yiddish in the Haredi communities. They provide evidence for the complete absence of morphological case and gender marking in the noun phrase in four centers of Hasidic culture (Israel, the New York area, Antwerp, and Montreal). By demonstrating a common development, they show how interconnected the language community is and that a cultural bond in a globalized world can make more impact than geographical proximity.

In Assouline's paper, one finds a discussion of a similar phenomenon. She reveals that a special *wh-ever* construction similar to that in 19th-century German spoken by Jews (Judeo-German) appears in the 21st century among American Hasidic Jews who are speakers of an Eastern Yiddish variety. Using this construction, Assouline suggests that Judeo-German speaking emigrants from Germany may have shaped Yiddish in the United States.

The articles presented in this special issue serve as examples of the work of linguists currently working on Yiddish. They are not meant to obscure the fact that Yiddish studies also include work on a wider spectrum of different fields within linguistics; rather, the purpose is to show that Yiddish remains of undiminished interest for linguistic research. We hope that this special issue will bolster awareness of the small field of Yiddish linguistics and that it will inspire future research. We would also like to remind the many linguists who adhere to the idea of comparative Germanic studies that Yiddish must not be forgotten.

Even if its speakers have a specific sociocultural background, it is no less exciting to compare Yiddish with English, German, Dutch, Afrikaans, or the Scandinavian languages.

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