

## Weak Interactions

### Yiddish influence in Hungarian, Esperanto and Modern Hebrew

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*When I arrived in Groningen, I was introduced to Tjeerd de Graaf as somebody speaking Hungarian. Then it turned out that both of us were interested in Yiddish. Furthermore, we shared the fact that we started our scientific life within physics, although, unlike Tjeerd, I have not worked as a physicist since my graduation. Nevertheless, as a second year physics student I received a research question from the late leading Hungarian physicist George Marx that was also somehow related to Tjeerd's earlier research topic, neutrino astrophysics.*

Neutrinos are funny particles. They are extremely light, if they have any mass, at all.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, they cannot interact through gravitation. Because they do not have any electrical charge either, electromagnetic interaction is also unknown to them. The only way they can interact with the universe is the so-called *weak interaction*, one of the four fundamental forces.<sup>2</sup> Nowadays physicists spend an inconceivable amount of budget building gigantic, underground basins containing millions of litres of heavy water just to try to detect a few neutrinos per year out of the very intense stream of neutrinos flowing constantly from the Sun and going through the Earth, that is, us. Even though they almost never interact with regular material, through weak interaction they play a fundamental role both in shaping what the universe looks like and in the Sun's energy production. Therefore our life would not be possible without neutrinos and without weak interaction.

Something similar happens in ethnolinguistics. The interaction between two languages may not always be very salient, and it cannot necessarily be explained by the most famous types of interactions. A *weak interaction* in linguistics might be an interaction which is not acknowledged by the speakers' community, for instance for ideologically reasons.

In the present paper I shall present three cases of weak interaction between languages, understood in this sense, namely Yiddish affecting Hungarian, Modern Hebrew (Israeli Hebrew) and Esperanto. All the stories

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take place in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, when a new or modernized language had to be created. We shall observe what kind of interactions took place under which conditions. A model for interactions combined with the better understanding of the social-historical setting will enable us to do so.

### 1. Language interactions within a given socio-historical setting

#### 1.1. Modelling interactions

In physics, the interaction between two bodies depends on three factors: the two “eligibilities” of the parties to interact, as well as their distance. For gravity and electromagnetism, the formula probably familiar from high-school physics states that the force is proportional to the product of the “eligibilities”—mass or electric charge—of the two bodies, divided by the square of their distance. In other words, the higher the two masses (or electric charges) and the smaller the distance, the stronger the interaction.

For Newton, who formulated this formula first, gravity was a long-range interaction. Modern physics has completed this picture with introducing *exchange particles* intermediating between the interacting bodies.<sup>3</sup> That way, contemporary science has also incorporated the view of Newton’s opponents who argued for the only possibility of short-range interactions.

To transplant this image, vaguely, into the phenomenon of language interaction, we have to identify the eligibilities of the two interacting languages, their distance and the exchange particles. In fact, we can do that even on two levels. On a purely linguistic level, one can easily point to words and grammatical phenomena—“exchange particles”—wandering from language to language. But it would be harder to identify in general the properties of the phenomena and of the given languages that make the interaction more probable or less probable.

The sociolinguistic level is more promising for such an approach. In this case, the human beings are the exchange particles: people who leave one linguistic community in order to join a new one. By the very fact of their moves, they affect their new language by a linguistic quantum. The closer the two language communities, the more people will act as an exchange particle. Here distance should be understood not only based on geography,

but on the intensity of the social network, as well. Thus, the more people wander to the target community, the more linguistic impulse is brought to the second language and therefore the stronger the interaction. Note that the physical analogy is not complete, since the symmetry of action and reaction is not guaranteed for interacting languages.

The three cases to be discussed share the feature that the role of the carriers of the interaction is played by late nineteenth century Eastern European Jews. In order to understand the historical background, we have to recall what is called *Haskala* or *Jewish Enlightenment*.

## 1.2. The *Haskala*

By the late eighteenth century, the French and German *Aufklärung* had raised the question whether to emancipate and integrate—or assimilate—the Jewish population on the one side, and an increasing wish to join the European culture on the other. Although in the second half of the *siècle des lumières* there were only a few Jewish intellectuals who articulated these ideas, most of them belonging to the circle of the philosopher *Moses Mendelssohn* (1729-1786) in Berlin, the next decades witnessed the acculturation of a growing segment of the Jewish population in the German territories, as well as within the Austrian Empire. The eighteenth century Berlin *Haskala* is called the *first stage* of the Jewish Enlightenment, whereas the early nineteenth century social and cultural developments represent its *second stage*.

What the first two stages of the *Haskala* yielded was including a Jewish colour on the contemporary Western European cultural palette. “Jewish” was understood exclusively as one possible faith within the list of European religions, and nothing more than a religious conviction. An enlightened Jew was supposed to fully master the educated standard variant of the language of the society he lived in (*Hochdeutsch*, in most of the cases), without any “Jewish-like” feature. Propagating the knowledge of *Hochdeutsch* and rolling back *Jüdischdeutsch* had been already the programme of Moses Mendelssohn when he began writing a modern *targum*<sup>4</sup> of the Bible, the *Biur*. Further, the same Jew was expected to fully master the contemporary European culture, including classical languages, sciences and arts. The only sphere in which this Jew could express his or her being Jewish was the diminished and Europeanised arena of religious life. Diminished, because of a secularisation of life style; and Europeanised, due to the inclusion of

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philosophical ideals of the Enlightenment together with aesthetic models of the Romanticism. The traditional religious duty of constantly learning the traditional texts with the traditional methods was sublimated into the scholarly movement of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

The picture changed dramatically in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Haskala, in its *third stage*, reached the Eastern European Jewry, including Jews in Poland and Lithuania (under Russian government), Eastern Hungary, and Rumania. Here the Jewish population was far denser, whereas the surrounding society was far behind Western Europe in the process of the social and economic development. In fact, Jews would play an important role in the modernization of those areas. Therefore, several people of Jewish origin could take the initiative and invent absolutely new alternatives to the social constructs that people had been living with so far.

One type of those social alternatives still preserved the idea of the earlier Haskala according to which Jews should become and remain an organic part of the universal human culture. These alternatives proposed thus some forms of revolutionary change to the entire humankind, as was the case in the different types of socialist movements, in which Jews unquestionably played an important role. Esperantism also belongs here, for its father, Ludwig Zamenhof was a Polish-Lithuanian Jew proposing an alternative to national language as another social construct.

The second type of radical answer that Eastern European Jews gave to the emergence of Enlightenment in the underdeveloped Eastern European milieu was creating a new kind of Jewish society. Recall that there was a dense Jewish population living within a society that itself did not represent a modern model to which most Jews wished to acculturate. Different streams of this type of answer emerged, although they did not mutually exclude each other. Many varieties of political activism, such as early forms of Zionism, political Zionism, territorialism or cultural autonomism, embody one level of creating an autonomous Jewish society.

The birth of a new Jewish secular culture, including literature, newspapers or Klezmer music is another one. The question then arose whether the language of this new secular culture should be Yiddish—and thus a standardized, literary version of Yiddish was to be developed—or Hebrew—and therefore a renewal of the Hebrew language was required. In the beginning, this point was not such an enormous matter of dispute as it would later develop into, when ‘Hebraists’, principally connected with Zionism, confronted ‘Yiddishists’, generally claiming a cultural and / or

political autonomy within Eastern Europe. It is the irony of history that the far more naïve and seemingly unrealistic ideology, calling for the revival of an almost unspoken language in the distant Palestine, was the one that later would become reality.

### 1.3. Language interactions in the Haskala

Let us now return to our model of language interactions. As we have seen, the intensity of the interaction depends on the number of “exchange particles”—language changing individuals—, that is a kind of “distance” measured in the social network; furthermore on the “digibility” of the languages to transmit and to adopt features. We shall now confront this model with the linguistic reality of the different stages of the Haskala.

Concerning the first stage, when only a handful of followers of Moses Mendelssohn rejected the *Jüdischdeutsch* and started speaking *Hochdeutsch*, our model will correctly predict that the number of exchange particles are insufficient to affect German in a perceptible way.

The number of exchange particles increases dramatically when we reach the first half of the nineteenth century. However, the people changing language more or less consciously adopted the idea of their original idiom being an unclean and corrupt version of the target language. Consequently, by nature their language change consisted of *not* bringing any influence on the target language with them. By applying our vague physical model to this situation, we might say that although the two languages were indeed close—from the viewpoints of geography, linguistic similarity and social contacts—, *Hochdeutsch* was not “digible” enough to be seriously affected.

What happened in the third stage of the Haskala? The following three case studies represent three possibilities. The first one, the influence of Yiddish on Hungarian, was actually a case where some elements of stage 2 Haskala were still present. The emancipation of the Jews was closely related to their assimilation into the Hungarian society, culture and language. As Jews wished to become an *equal* part of that society, let us call this case *type e*. Each of the many people brings only a very “light” quantum of influence, similarly to the very little mass, if any, of the electron neutrinos. The *type mu* designates a case when Jews *migrated* to a newly created Jewish “land, language and culture”, namely to modern Hebrew. Here less people carry possibly more “weight”, that is why they

can be paralleled by the heavier *muon neutrinos*. In the third case, that is the birth of Esperanto, only one person of Jewish cultural background wished to *transform* the entire word, with a *total* rejection of reference to any form of Jewishness, at least on a conscious level (*type tau*, referring to the probably heaviest type of neutrinos).

## 2. Three examples of weak interaction

### 2.1. Type e: Yiddish and Hungarian

Nineteenth century Hungary was situated on the border of Western European Jewry, affected already by the first two stages of Haskala, and Eastern European Jewry, which would be reached only by its third phase. From the second half of the previous century onward, the Jewish immigration from Bohemia and Moravia had been importing a rather urbanized population speaking Western Yiddish, or even *Jüdischdeutsch*, whereas Eastern Yiddish speaking Galician Jews inhabiting Eastern Hungary represented the westernmost branch of Eastern European Jewry. Not only were the linguistic features of the two groups strikingly different, but also their social, economic and cultural background.

In the social and economic fields, Hungary met a first wave of modernization in the 1830s and 1840s, which is referred to as the *reform age*, reaching its peak in the 1848-49 revolution. After the so-called *Compromise* with Austria in 1867, the consequence of which had been the creation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with a dualistic system, the most urbanized parts of the country showed an especially remarkable economic and cultural growth.

Parallel to the phenomenon of general modernization, the Jewish population underwent a similar process to the one we have already seen apropos of the French and German Jewry that had gone through these social changes fifty years earlier. The second quarter of the century already witnesses a few Jewish thinkers, mainly rabbis arriving from Germany or Bohemia, and bringing modern ideals with them. Yet, their effect cannot be perceived on a larger social scale before the last third of the century.

A few differences should, however, be noted between German and Hungarian Haskala. First, for the larger society into which Hungarian Jews

wished to integrate, Enlightenment was not so much the consequence of the *Embourgeoisement*, rather its catalyst. Enormous heterogeneities in the degree of development could be found within the country, both in social, as well as economic terms. This general picture was paralleled with a heterogeneous distribution of Eastern and Western type of Jewry. Thus, even if the most Europeanised Jews may have wished, they could not disown their pre-Haskala coreligionists living close to them.

Moreover, the modern Hungarian society and culture had to be created *in spite of the* Austrian occupation. Social constructs underwent huge changes, and any group of people identifying themselves as Hungarian—and not Austrian—could influence the new shapes of society and culture. Immigrants from all directions played a fundamental role in laying down the bases of modern Hungarian urban culture. These are the circumstances under which most of the Jews chose the Hungarian, rather than the German or Yiddish culture and language. This decision was far from being evident. Even most of the orthodox adopted Hungarian, though more slowly and by keeping simultaneously Yiddish.

By putting together the pieces, we obtain an image in which the dynamically changing Hungarian culture and society is searching new, modern forms, and is ready to integrate foreign influences—as long as the carriers identify themselves as new Hungarians. Further, a major part of the Jewish population is seeking its place in this new society, wants to adopt the new culture, but is still strongly connected—often against its will—to the pre-Haskala Jewry living not so far from them. Consequently, we have both a high “digibility” for being influenced on the part of the Hungarian language, and a large number of “exchange particles” flowing from Yiddish to Hungarian.<sup>5</sup>

What is the outcome of such a situation? Let us consider a few examples of Yiddishisms in Hungarian. I shall distinguish between three registers that Yiddishisms entered considerably: the Jewish sociolect of Hungarian, argot (slang), and standard Hungarian.

The vocabulary of Hungarian speaking Jews unsurprisingly includes a large number of words specific to domains of Jewish culture and religion.

In some cases only phonological assimilation takes place. The Hungarian phonological system lacks a short [a], and the short counterpart of [a:] is [a]. Therefore the Yiddish word [raʃɛʃɔnɛ] (‘Rosh Ha-shana, name of the Jewish New Year’, from Hebrew [rɔʃ haʃana], i.e. [rɔʃ ha:ʃɔnɔ] in standard Hungarian Ashkenazi pronunciation) becomes optionally [raʃɛʃɔnɛ]. Although the original Yiddish pronunciation [raʃɛʃɔnɛ] is still

possible, the latter emphasizes the foreign origin of the word. An analogous example is the word *barchesz* ([barhɛs] or [barhɛs], ‘chala, a special bread used on Shabbat and holidays’), which is clearly from Yiddish origin, but is unknown outside Hungary; it may have belonged to the vocabulary of Hungarian Yiddish.

Other words immediately underwent Hungarian morphological processes. In fact, it is a well known phenomenon in many languages of the world that borrowed verbs, unlike borrowed nouns, cannot be integrated directly into the vocabulary of a given language. This is the case in words like *lejnol* (‘to read the Torah-scroll in the synagogue’), *lejnolás* (‘the reading of the Torah-scroll’) as well as *snóder* (‘money given as donation’), *snóderol* (‘to donate money, especially after the public Torah-reading’), *snóderolás* (‘the act of money donation’). In the first case, the Yiddish verb *leyenen* (‘idem’)<sup>6</sup> was borrowed and one of the two most frequent denominal verbal suffixes, *-l*, was added.<sup>7</sup> The word *lejnolás* is the *nomen actionis* formed with the suffix *-ás*. The expression *tfilint légol* (‘to put on the phylacteries’) originates from German and Yiddish *legen*, and has gone through the same processes. For *snóderol*, Hungarian borrows a Yiddish noun,<sup>8</sup> which then serves as the base of further derivations.

The Jewish sociolect of Hungarian includes further lexical items, which do not belong to the domain of religious practice or Jewish culture. One such word is *unberufn* (‘without calling [the devil]’), which should be added out of superstition to any positive statement that the speaker hopes to remain true in the future. For instance: ‘My child grows in beauty, *unberufn*’ (Blau-Láng, 1995:66). Nowadays, many people of the generation born after World War II and raised already in an almost non-Yiddish speaking milieu judge this expression as having nothing to do with superstition, but qualifying a situation as surprisingly good, like ‘You don’t say so! It’s incredible!’ and definitely including also some irony.<sup>9</sup> Others of that generation say in the same surprising-ironic context: ‘My grandma’ would have said: *unberufn...*’, even if Grandma’ had used that word in a slightly different way. This second meaning of *unberufn* clearly lacks any reference to superstition, since the same people would use another expression (*lekopogom*) to say ‘touch wood! knock on wood!’.

Unlike the previous interjections, the adjective *betámt* (‘nice, intelligent, smart, sweet, lovely’) already enters the “real” syntax of the target language, even if morphological and phonological changes have not taken place yet—that happened in the case of *lejnol* and *snóderol*. This word consists of the Hebrew root *taam* (‘taste’), together with the Germanic

verbal prefix *be-* and past participle ending *-t*. The resulting word denotes a person who ‘has some taste’: somebody who has some characteristic traits, who is interesting, who has style and some sense of humour, who is kind, polite, and so on. It is typically used by ‘Yiddishe mames’ describing the groom they wish their daughter had.

So far, we have seen examples where the language changing population has kept its original expression to denote something that could be best expressed using items of their old vocabulary. This Jewish sociolect has become an organic part of modern Hungarian, acknowledged, and partially known by many non-Jewish speakers, as well. But do we also find influences of Yiddish outside of the Jewish sociolect?

The register that is the most likely to be affected under such circumstances is probably always slang: it is non-conformist by definition, and, therefore, it is the least conservative. Slang is also the field where social norms, barriers and older prejudices play the least role. This may be the reason why Hungarian slang created in the nineteenth century borrowed so much from the languages of two socially marginal groups: the Gipsy (Roma) languages and Yiddish. In contemporary Hungarian slang, one can find well-known words from Yiddish origin such as: *kóser* (‘kosher’, meaning ‘good’ in slang); *tré* (‘bad, crappy, grotty’, from Hebrew-Yiddish-Hungarian *tréfli* ‘ritually unclean, non kosher food’); *majré* (‘fear, dread, rabbit fever’, from Hebrew *mora* ‘fear’ > Ashkenazi [məyrɔ] > Yiddish *moyre* [məyre] > Hungarian [məjre:]), further derived to *majrézik* (‘to fear, to be afraid of sg.’); *szajré* (‘swag, loot, hot stuff’, from Hebrew *sehora* ‘goods, merchandise’), and so on (Benkő *et al.*, 1967-76). An interesting construction is *stikában*, meaning ‘in the sly, in secret, quietly’. Its origin is the Aramaic-Hebrew noun [stika] ‘remaining silent’, which receives a Hungarian inessive case ending, meaning ‘in’.

Through slang, some of the Yiddish words have then infiltrated into the standard language and become quasi-standard. Thus, the word *haver*—from the Hebrew [χaver] ‘friend’—is used nowadays as an informal synonym for a ‘good acquaintance, a friend’. Similarly, *dafke* means in spoken Hungarian ‘For all that! Only out of spite!’. Furthermore, there are words of Yiddish origin which did not enter Hungarian through the slang, but through cultural interaction: *macesz* (‘matzo, unleavened bread’, from Hebrew *matzot*, plural form of *matza*; its ending clearly shows that the word arrived to Hungarian through Yiddish) or *sólet* (‘tsholent’, a typically Hungarian Jewish bean dish, popular among non-Jews, too).<sup>10</sup>

To summarize, the high amount of “exchange particles”, that is, Jewish people gradually changing their language from Yiddish to Hungarian, has affected the target language in three manners. One of them has been the creation of a special Jewish sociolect. This was not a secret language though, and non-Jews have borrowed quite a few expressions. This fact led to the second manner of influence, namely to the high amount of Yiddish words entering the slang. Some of these words have infiltrated even into the relatively more informal registers of the standard language. The third manner is cultural interaction: the exchange of cultural goods—for instance in the field of gastronomy—inevitably has resulted the exchange of the vocabulary designating those goods.

## 2.2. Type $\mu$ : Yiddish and Modern Hebrew

The fruit of Western European Haskala in the field of science was the birth of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The Jewish scholars belonging to this group aimed to introduce modern approaches when dealing with traditional texts, Jewish history, and so forth. Their approach contrasted traditional rabbinical activity the same way as the romanticist cantorial compositions by *Salomon Sulzer* and *Louis Lewandowski* contrasted traditional synagogal music: modernists aimed to produce cultural goods that were esteemed by the modern society, both by Jews and the recipient country. A further motivation of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was to expose the values of post-Biblical Jewish culture, and to present them as an organic part of universal culture: by emancipating Jewish past, they hoped to be also emancipated by contemporary society.

This background illuminates why early Haskala honoured so much Hebrew—the language of the contribution *par excellence* of the Jewish nation to universal culture, which is the Hebrew Bible, and a language that had been long studied by Christian Hebraists. And also why Yiddish, the supposedly jargon of the uneducated Jews and a corrupt version of German, was so much scorned in the same time.

Although the goal of the earlier phases of Haskala was to promote the literary language of the recipient country among Jews, that is practically *Hochdeutsch*, and Hebrew was principally only the object of scholarly study, still some attempts were made to use the language in modern domains, at least for some restricted purposes. After a few pioneering experiments to establish Hebrew newspapers in the middle of the

eighteenth century, the Hebrew literary quarterly *Ha-Meassef* appeared as early as 1784 (Sáenz-Badillos, 1993:267).

However, it was not before the middle of the next century, when Haskala reached Russia, that the need of reviving the Hebrew language was really articulated. As already discussed, the major reasons for this switch were that the Jewish population did not see the underdeveloped surrounding society as a model to which they wanted to assimilate; the Russian society and policy did not show any real sign of wanting to emancipate and integrate Jews, either; furthermore, the huge Jewish population reached the critical mass required to develop something in itself. The summation of these factors led to the idea of seeing Jewry as separate a nation in its modern sense. A further factor reinforcing Jewish national feelings both in Eastern and Western Europe was the emergence of modern political anti-Semitism in the 1870s in the West, accompanied by events such as the huge Russian pogroms in 1881, the blood libel of Tiszaeszlár, Hungary (1882-3) or the Dreyfus-affair in France (starting in 1894).

The claims following from this idea were that the Jewish nation has the right to have a country—in Palestine or elsewhere, but at least it should receive some local autonomy—, and also that the Jewish nation must have its own national language. The two major candidates for the Jewish national language were Yiddish and Hebrew, although German was not out of the competition, either (cf. e.g. Shur 1979:VII-VIII).

The first wave of attempts to revive Hebrew consisted mainly of purists, seeing Biblical Hebrew as the most precious layer of the language: some of them went so far that they preferred to create very complicated expressions to designate modern concepts, rather than using non-Biblical vocabulary. The fruits of this early period are among others the first regular Hebrew weekly, *Ha-Maggid* (1856), the first modern play by *D. Zamoscz* (1851), novels by *A. Mapu*, as well as works of *S. J. Abramowitsch* (*Mendele Moykher Seforim*), who can be considered one of the founders of both modern Hebrew and modern Yiddish literature.

The real upswing was observable in the last quarter of the century, especially after the 1881 pogroms, and when Haskala had reached the broadest masses, as well. Traditionally, the publication of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda's article in 1879 entitled 'A burning question' is considered to be the opening of the new era (Sáenz-Badillos, 1993:269). *Ben-Yehuda* (1858-1922) has been portrayed as the hero of the revival: he moved to Jerusalem in 1881, where he forced himself and his family to *speak* Hebrew. To *speak* a language, that is to produce everyday, spontaneous sentences "in real-

time”, on a language that had been mostly used for writing and reading and only in restricted domains. His son, Ithamar (1882-1943), was the first person after millennia who grew up in an exclusively Hebrew-speaking environment. Ben-Yehuda constantly introduced new words designating weekday concepts, while he was editing a newspaper and working on his monumental *Thesaurus*, which incorporated material from ancient and medieval literature. In 1890, he founded the *Va’ad ha-Lashon* (‘Language Committee’), the forerunner of the *Hebrew Language Academy*, hereby creating a quasi-official institution for language planning.

However, Shur (1979) has argued against an overestimation of Ben-Yehuda’s role. Out of Fishman’s five stages of language planning (1. code selection; 2. ideologization of the choice; 3. codification; 4. elaboration and modernization; 5. standardization, *i.e.* the acceptance by the community), Ben-Yehuda was salient especially in codification and elaboration, as well as in vitalization, which was also necessary under the given circumstances. But for socio-political reasons, he had no much influence on the initial language choice and its ideologization, as well as on the final acceptance of the codified and elaborated standard.

It is clear that Yiddish was the mother tongue, or one of the main languages for a major fraction of the members of the *Va’ad ha-Lashon*, including Ben-Yehuda himself. Moreover, people with Yiddish as first language represented an important part of the speaker community of the old-new tongue in the first half of the twentieth century. Although Yiddish was not scorned anymore, as it had been a century before, but was not considered as a major source for language reform, either. Especially for the later generations, Yiddish would symbolize the Diaspora left behind by the Zionist movement.

Yiddish speaking “ex change particles” dominated the community, much more than in the Hungarian case. Yet, a very conscious ideology required changing the previous *ethnic language* to the old-new *national language*, especially after the 1913-14 ‘Language Quarrel’, wherein the defenders of Hebrew defeated those of German and Yiddish (Shur 1979:VII-VIII, X). This ideology was actively present in almost each and every individual who had chosen to move to the Land of Israel in a given period—contrary to the European case, where ideology of changing the language was explicit only in the cultural elite. Further, the language change was not slow and gradual, but drastic in the life of the people emigrating to Palestine, combined with a simultaneous radical change in geographical location, social structure and lifestyle. What phenomena would this constellation involve?

Yiddish influence on Modern Hebrew vocabulary has been investigated by—among others—Haim Blanc. For instance, the Modern Hebrew interjection *davka* (approx. 'necessarily, for all that') is clearly a Hebraisation of Yiddish *dafke*, of Hebrew origin itself, and mentioned also in relation with Hungarian. Similarly, *kumzitz* 'get-together, picnic, campfire' undoubtedly originates from the Yiddish expression 'come [and] sit down!', since only in Yiddish do we find [u] in the verb 'to come'. However, the expression was probably coined in Hebrew, as standard Yiddish dictionaries do not mention it. One can easily imagine the early pioneers sitting around a campfire in the first kibbutzim, chatting in a mixture of Yiddish and Hebrew, and inviting their comrades to join them.

Nissan Netzer (1988) analyses the use of the Modern Hebrew verb *firgen* and the corresponding de-verbal noun *firgun*. Officially, the word is still not considered to belong to the language, for it is not attested in any dictionary of Hebrew that I know. Definitions for this word I have found on the Internet are: "the ability to allow someone else to enjoy if his or her enjoyment does not hurt one," and "to treat favourably, with equanimity, to bear no grudge or jealousy against somebody," and also "to be delighted at the success of the other". The word can be traced back to Yiddish *farginen* 'not begrudge, not envy, indulge'. As Netzer has demonstrated, there is a linguistic gap in Hebrew, for the expressions *darash et tovato shel...* or *lo hayta eno tsara be-* that should bear that meaning are cumbersome, circuitous, overly sophisticated in style and seems to cloud the true linguistic message. Therefore, they were not accepted by the linguistic community. When a leading Hebrew linguistics professor used the Yiddish equivalent in the early sixties, the situation made the listeners of an academic lecture smile, because in that time the Yiddishism was considered to be a folk idiom that would finally withdraw in favour of a 'real Hebrew expression'. However, *firgen* would have become more and more accepted in daily conversation and even in journalistic writings by the eighties.<sup>11</sup>

This example has led us to the issue of the sociolinguistic status of Yiddish words in Modern Hebrew. Ora Schwarzwald (1995) shows that the vocabulary of the most used classical texts, such as the Hebrew Bible and liturgy, has become the base of Modern Hebrew, in all its registers. Furthermore, loanwords of European languages are also used both in formal and non-formal language. However, from less esteemed languages, such as Jewish languages (e.g. Yiddish and Ladino), as well as Arabic, words would infiltrate primarily into lower registers and everyday informal speech.

For instance, *chevre* ‘friends’ is used mainly when addressing informally a group of people, and it is the borrowing of the similar word in Yiddish (*khevre* ‘gang, bunch of friends, society’). The latter obviously comes from Hebrew *chevra* ‘society, company, gathering’, whose root is *chaver* ‘friend’, a well-known word for speakers of Hungarian and Dutch (*gabber*), too. The originally Hebrew word thus arrived back to Modern Hebrew, but keeping the phonological traces of its trajectory. Also note the minor shifts in the semantics during the two borrowings.

Another example for Yiddish influence on informal speech is the use of the *-le* diminutive suffix: *abale* from *aba* ‘dad’, *Sarale* ‘little Sarah’, *Chanale* ‘little Hanah’, and so forth. Observe that the suffix follows the Hebrew word, whereas in Yiddish one would have *Sorele* and *Chanele*.

Thus, the influence of Yiddish on Modern Hebrew is indeed similar to its influence on Hungarian: lower registers and informal speech constitute one of the canals through which this interaction takes place. To make the similarity even more prominent, we can point to two further canals, shared by the Modern Hebrew case and the Hungarian case. Similarly to Hungarian, the designation of goods of general culture, such as food names (*beygelach* ‘bagels or pretzel’) represent a domain for word borrowings. Moreover, Yiddish loan words, or Hebrew words with a Yiddish or Ashkenazi pronunciation are likely to appear in religious vocabulary (e.g. *rebe* ‘Chasidic charismatic leader’); typically in the sociolect of religious groups (especially within the ultra-orthodox society), and in the language used by secular Israelis to mock the stereotypically Yiddish-speaking ultra-orthodox Jews (e.g. *dos* ‘an ultra-orthodox person’, from Hebrew *dat* ‘religion’; *vus-vus-im* ‘the Ashkenazi ultra-orthodox Jews’, who often say *Vus? Vus?* ‘What? What?’, followed by the Hebrew plural ending *-im*).

### 2.3. Type $\tau$ : Yiddish and Esperanto

Esperanto emerged in the very same context as Modern Hebrew. Its creator, *Lazar Ludwik Zamenhof* (1859-1917), was born one year after Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, similarly from a Jewish family living in a small Lithuanian town, whose population was composed of Russian, Polish and Lithuanian people, but was dominated by a Jewish majority. The *Litvak* (Lithuanian-Jewish) Haskala background of both men encouraged traditional Jewish education combined with studies in a secular *Gymnasium*; both of them went on to study medicine. Following the 1881 wave of pogroms, in the year in which

Ben-Yehuda moved to Jerusalem, Zamenhof published an article calling for mass emigration to a Jewish homeland. For a few years, he became one of the first activists of the early Zionist movement *Hovevei Tzion* (“Lovers of Zion”). Berdichevsky (1986) points out the similarities even in the mentality and the physical appearance of Zamenhof and Ben-Yehuda.

Nevertheless, two key differences should be pointed out. The first one is Zamenhof’s pragmatism. In his 1881 article, Zamenhof imagined the Jewish homeland to be in the western part of the United States, a relatively unsettled area those days, which would have arisen much less sensibility from all sides. Furthermore, Zamenhof shared the scepticism of many of his contemporaries in the feasibility to revive the Hebrew language. According to the anecdote, Theodor Herzl said once that he could not buy even a train ticket in Hebrew. Leading Jewish writers, such as Mendele Moykher Seforim, oscillated between writing in Yiddish and in Hebrew; both of these languages called for the establishment of a modern, secular literary tongue. The young and pragmatic Zamenhof chose to reform Yiddish, the language with millions of native speakers; whereas the first native speaker of Modern Hebrew, the son of Ben-Yehuda was not born yet.

In his early years, Zamenhof wrote a comprehensive Yiddish grammar (completed in 1879, partially published in 1909 in the Vilna Journal, *Lebn un Vissenschaft*, and fully published only in 1982). He argued for the modernization of the language and fought for the use of the Latin alphabet, instead of the Hebrew one. How is it possible then that a few years later Zamenhof changed his mind, and switched to Esperanto (1887)?

Here comes the second key difference into the picture. Ben-Yehuda was sent by his orthodox family to a yeshiva (traditional school teaching mainly the Talmud), where one of the rabbis introduced him secretly into the revolutionary ideas of the Haskala. On the contrary, Zamenhof’s father and grandfather were enlightened high-school teachers of Western languages (French and German). For him, being Jewish probably meant a universal mission to make the world a better place for the whole humankind. This idea originates from eighteenth century German Haskala philosophers claiming that Judaism is the purest embodiment so-far existing of the universal moral and of the faith of the Pure Reason; even today a major part of Jews worldwide perceive Judaism this way.

Zamenhof did not therefore content himself with the goal of creating a Jewish national language. For him, similarly to his semi-secularised coreligionists joining the socialist movement in the same decades, unifying the human race and building a new world order presented the solution for—

among others—the problems of the oppressed Eastern European Jewry. And also the other way around: the secular messianic idea of the unification of the dispersed and oppressed Jews into a Jewish nation was just one step behind from the secular messianic idea of the unification of the whole mankind into a supra-national unit. This explains not only the motivations of Zamenhof himself, but also why Jews played such an important role in the pre-World War II Esperanto movement in Central and Eastern Europe (Berdichevsky, 1986:60). Whereas socialists fought for a social-economic liberation of the oppressed, Zamenhof spoke about the liberation of the humans from the cultural and linguistic barriers. It is not a coincidence that the twentieth century history of the Esperantist movement was so much intermingled with the one of the socialist movements.

Zamenhof's initiative was to create a language that would be equally distant from and equally close to each ethnic language, thus each human being would have equal chance using this bridge connecting cultures and people. Hence Zamenhof created a vocabulary and a grammar using elements of languages he knew: Russian (the language his father spoke home and the language of his high-school), German and French (the languages his father and grandfather were teachers of), Polish (the language of his non-Jewish fellow children), Latin and Greek (from high-school), as well as English and Italian. Note that the resulting language, similarly to most artificial languages, is inherently European and Indo-European in its character, though extremely simplified.

However, one should not forget that Zamenhof's native tongue was Yiddish, this was the language he used with his school mates in the Jewish primary school (*kheyder*, cf. Piron, 1984), and most of his life he kept contact with circles where Yiddish was alive. So one would wonder why Yiddish is not mentioned overtly among the source languages of Esperanto. Seeing Zamenhof's former devotion for the Jewish sake and the Yiddish language, as well as his later remark that Yiddish is a language similar to any other (in *Homo Sum*, 1901, cf. Piron (1984:17) and Berdichevsky (1986:70)), the possibility that he despised "the corrupt version of German" or that he felt shame at his Yiddish origins, are out of question.

The challenging task now is to find at least covert influences of Yiddish on Esperanto.

As strange as it may sound, a considerable literature has been devoted to etymology within Esperanto linguistics. One of the biggest mysteries is the morpheme *edz*. As a root, it means 'married person' (*edzo* 'husband'; *edzino* 'wife', by adding the feminine suffix *-in-*). While as a suffix, it turns

the word's meaning into the wife or husband of the stem: *lavistino* 'washer-woman' vs. *lavistinedzo* 'washerwoman's husband'; *doktoro* 'doctor' vs. *doktoredzino* 'doctor's wife'. Hungarian Esperantists have tried to use this suffix to translate the Hungarian suffix *-n * ('wife of...', e.g.: *De kn * 'wife of De k, Mrs. De k'; cf. Goldin (1982:28)). The phonemic content of the morpheme is not similar to any word with related meaning in any of the languages that Zamenhof might have taken into consideration.

Zamenhof himself wrote in a letter to  mile Boirac that the morpheme was the result of backformation, and that originally it was a bound form (Goldin, 1982:22f). Boirac suggested in 1913 the following reconstruction: if the German *Kronprinz* ('heir apparent') became *kronprinco* in Esperanto, while *Kronprinzessin* ('wife of a crown prince', note the double feminine ending: the French feminine suffix *-esse* is followed by the Germanic feminine *-in*) turns to *kronprincdzino*, then the ending *-edzin-* can be identified as 'a woman legally bound to a man'. By removing the feminine suffix *-in-*, we obtain the morpheme *-edz-*. Goldin adds to this theory that the morphemes *es* and *ec* had already been used with other meanings, that is why the surprising [dz] combination appeared. Summarizing, the etymology of the Esperanto morpheme *edz* would be the French feminine ending *-esse*, which had been reanalysed with a different meaning due to the additional feminine suffix in German.

However, this is not the end of the story. Other alternatives have been also proposed. Waringhien and others have brought forward the idea that the word serving as the base of backformation was the Yiddish word *rebetsin* ('wife of a rabbi'). In fact, this word can be reanalysed as *reb+edz+in*, and we obtain the *edz* morpheme using the same logic as above. Goldin's counterargument that the Yiddish word is actually *rebetsn* with a syllabic [n] is not at all convincing: old Yiddish spelling often uses the letter *yod* to designate a schwa, or even more the syllabicity of an [n], similarly to the 'e' in German spelling, like in *wissen*. Consequently, I can indeed accept the idea that a pre-YIVO spelling *rebetsin* was in the mind of Zamenhof.

Piron (1984) adds further cases of possible Yiddish influence. In words taken from German, the affricate [pf] always changes to [f]: German *pfeifen* 'to whistle' became Esperanto *fajfi*. This coincides with Yiddish *fayfn*. Though, one is not compelled to point to Yiddish as the origin of this word: the reason can simply be that the affricate [pf] is too typical to German, not occurring in any other languages that served "officially" as examples for Zamenhof. In other words, [pf] was not seen as universal enough. But what

about the consonant clusters [ʃm], [ʃp], [ʃt], which are also characteristic solely to German (and to Yiddish)? May the solution be that while [pf] becomes [f] in Yiddish, these clusters are unchanged; therefore, Zamenhof felt less discomfort with regard to the latter clusters than with regard to [pf] which truly occurs exclusively in German? I do not believe that we can do more than speculate about the different unconscious factors acting within a person more than a hundred years ago. The only claim we can make is that some of these factors must have been related to Yiddish, as expected from the fact that Yiddish was one of the major tongues of Zamenhof.

In the field of semantics, Piron brings the differentiation in Esperanto between *landa* ('national, related to a given country', adjective formed from *lando* 'country') as opposed to *nacia* ('national, related to a given nation', adjective from *nacio* 'nation'). This differentiation exists in Yiddish (*landish* and *natsional*), but not in any other languages that Zamenhof might have taken into consideration. Piron also argues against the possible claim that this is not a Yiddish influence, rather an inner development related to the inner logic of Esperanto.

The most evident example of Piron is Esperanto *superjaro* 'leap year', a compound of *super* 'on' and *jaro* 'year'. No known language uses the preposition *on* or *above* to express this concept. However, Yiddish has *iberyor* for 'leap year', from Hebrew *ibbur* ('making pregnant'), the term used in rabbinic literature for intercalating an extra month and making the year a leap year (e.g. Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 2:1-7). On the other hand, *iber* also means 'above' in Yiddish, which explains the strange expression in Esperanto. I do not know if Zamenhof realized that the Yiddish expression *iberyor* is *not* related to German *über*, but this is probably not relevant.

Let us summarize this section. Yiddish influence on Esperanto is a case where there is only one exchange particle—in the first order approximation, at least, since we have not dealt with the possible influences related to the numerous later speakers of Esperanto of Yiddish background. Though, this one particle had a huge impact on the language for a very obvious reason. Even if he did not overtly acknowledge that Yiddish had played a role in creating Esperanto, it is possible to discover the—either consciously hidden or unconscious—traces of Yiddish.

Did Zamenhof want to deny that he had also used Yiddish, as a building block of Esperanto? Perhaps because his goal was indeed to create a universal, supra-national language, and not the language of the Jewish nation? Or, alternatively, was this influence unconscious? I do not dare to give an answer.

### 3. Conclusion

In linguistics, we could define *weak interaction* as an interaction that is not overtly acknowledged. No one would deny the influence of the French-speaking ruling class on medieval English, or the impact of the Slavic neighbours on Hungarian. But sometimes, conscious factors hide the effect. Yet, weak interactions are as crucial for the development of a language, as the nuclear processes emitting neutrinos in the core of the Sun that produce the energy which is vital for us.

We have seen three cases of weak interaction between languages. In fact, all three stories were about the formative phase of a new or modernized language, in the midst of the late nineteenth century Eastern Europe Jewry. In the cases of Yiddish influencing Hungarian and Modern Hebrew, the number of “exchange particles”, that is, the amount of initially Yiddish-speaking people joining the new language community, were extremely high: roughly one tenth of the Hungarian speaking population in nineteenth century Hungary, and probably above 50% of the Jews living in early twentieth century Palestine. Nonetheless, in both cases we encounter an ideology promoting the new language and disfavours Yiddish.

Because the level of consciousness of this ideology seems to be inversely proportional to the ratio of “exchange particles”—stronger in Palestine than in Hungary—, the two factors extinguish each other, and we find similar phenomena. For instance, Yiddish has affected first and foremost lower registers, which are less censored by society; therefrom it infiltrates into informal standard language. Additional trends are Yiddish words entering specific domains, such as gastronomy or Jewish religious practice. Although it is essential to note that not all concepts that are new in the target culture are expressed by their original Yiddish word: many new expressions in these domains have been coined in Hungarian and Modern Hebrew, and accepted by the language community.

The third case that we have examined is different. Zamenhof was a single person, but as the creator of Esperanto, he had an enormous influence on the new language. The influence of Yiddish was again weak in the sense that it was not overtly admitted; however, we could present examples where the native tongue of Zamenhof influenced the new language. We could have cited, as the articles mentioned had done, numerous further instances where the influence of Yiddish cannot be proven directly, the given phenomenon could have been taken from other

languages, as well; however, one can hypothesize that Yiddish played—consciously or unconsciously—a reinforcing role in Zamenhof’s decisions.

I do hope that I have been able to prove to the reader that seemingly very remote fields, such as physics, social history and linguistics, can be interconnected, at least for the sake of a thought experiment. Furthermore, “exchange particles” in the field of science, and Tjeerd are certainly among them, have hopefully brought at least some weak interaction among the different disciplines.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> According to <http://cupp.oulu.fi/neutrino/nd-mass.html>, the mass of the *electron neutrino* ( $\nu_e$ ) is less than 2.2 eV, the mass of the *muon neutrino* ( $\nu_\mu$ ) does not exceed 170 keV, while the mass of the *tau neutrino* ( $\nu_\tau$ ) is reported to be below 15.5 MeV. For the sake of comparison, the mass of an electron is 511 keV, while the mass of a proton is almost 940 MeV.
  - <sup>2</sup> Physical phenomena are thought to be reducible to four *fundamental forces*. These are gravity, electromagnetism, weak interaction and strong interaction. The last two play a role in sub-atomic physics.
  - <sup>3</sup> The *photons* (particles of the light) are the exchange particles for the electromagnetic interaction; the hypothetical *gravitons* should transmit gravitation; in the case of the weak interaction, the  $W^+$ ,  $W^-$  and  $Z$  *vector bosons* play that role; whereas the strong interaction is mediated by *pions*.
  - <sup>4</sup> *Targumim* (plural of *targum*) are the Jewish Aramaic versions of the Hebrew Bible from the late antiquity, including also many commentaries beside the pure translation. The same way as late antiquity Jews created the commented translation of the Holy Scriptures to their native tongue and using their way of thinking, Moses Mendelssohn expected his version of the Bible to fit the modern way of thinking and the “correct language” of its future readers. Obviously, the Biur should first have to fulfil its previous task, namely to teach the modern way of thinking and the “correct tongue” to the first generation of its readers. Interestingly enough, script was not such a major issue for Mendelssohn as “language purity”, thus he wrote *Hochdeutsch* in Hebrew characters, in order to better disseminate his work among the Jewish population.
  - <sup>5</sup> I assume that the formative phase of modern Dutch society and culture in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century is comparable to that of 19<sup>th</sup> century Hungary; even more is so the role of Jewry in both countries, as a group which was simultaneously integrating into the new society and also forming it. In both cases, the presence of the continuous spectrum from the pre-Haskala *Yid* to the self-modernizing *Israelite* led to a gradual, though determined giving up of the Yiddish language. This socio-historical parallelism could partially explain why phenomena of Yiddish influence on Dutch are often similar to that on Hungarian. Concerning Dutch-Jewish linguistic interactions, readers interested in Jewish aspects of Papiamentu, a creole language spoken in the Netherlands Antilles, are referred to *Richard E. Wood's* article in *Jewish Language Review* 3 (1983):15-18.

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- <sup>6</sup> The etymology of the Yiddish word itself is also interesting. The origin is the late Latin or Old French root [lɛj] ‘to read’ (cf. to Latin *lego*, *legere*, modern French *je lis*, *lire*), which was borrowed by the Jews living in early medieval Western Europe. The latter would then change their language to Old High German, the ancestor of Yiddish. At some point, the meaning of the Old French word was restricted to the public reading of the Torah-scroll in the synagogue.
- <sup>7</sup> Compare to *sí* ‘ski’ > *síel* ‘to ski’, *tűz* ‘fire’ > *tűzel* ‘to fire’; also: *printel* ‘to print with a computer printer’. It is extremely surprising that the word *lej nol* does not follow vowel harmony, one would expect \**lejnel*. Even though the [ɛ] sound can be transparent for vowel harmony, this fact is not enough to explain the word *lej nol*. Probably the dialectal Yiddish *laynen* was originally borrowed, and this form served as the base for word formation, before the official Yiddish form *leynen* influenced the Hungarian word. Some people still say *láj nol*.
- <sup>8</sup> When being called to the Torah during the public reading, one recites a blessing, the text of which says: ‘He Who blessed our forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, may He bless [the name of the person] because he has come up to the Torah / who has promised to contribute to charity on behalf of... etc.’ The part of the text ‘who has promised’ sounds in the Ashkenazi pronunciation [mi ʃenodar]. This is most probably the source of the word *snóder*, after vowel in the unstressed last syllable has become a schwa, a process that is crucial for understanding the Yiddishization of Hebrew words. The exciting part of the story is that the proclitic [ʃɛ] (‘that’) was kept together with the following finite verbal form ([nadar] ‘he promised’), and they were reanalysed as one word.
- <sup>9</sup> When I asked people about the meaning of *unberufn* on the mailing list [2nd-Generation-Jews-Hungary@yahoogroups.com](mailto:2nd-Generation-Jews-Hungary@yahoogroups.com), somebody reported that her non-Jewish grandmother also used to say *unberufn* with a similar meaning.
- <sup>10</sup> Other Hungarian words of Hebrew origin do not come from Yiddish, as shown by their non-Ashkenazi pronunciation: *Tóra* ([to:ra] ‘Torah’, as opposed to its Yiddish counterpart *Toyre*) or *rabbi* (and not *rov* or *rebe*). Words like *behemót* (‘big hulking fellow’), originally from Biblical Hebrew *behema* (‘cattle’, plural: *behemot*; appearing also as a proper name both in Jewish and in Christian mythology) should be rather traced back to Christian Biblical tradition.
- <sup>11</sup> Note, that the word has kept its original word initial [f], without transforming it into [p], which would have been predicted by Hebrew phonology. Although this is a remarkable fact for Netzer, it turns out that almost no word borrowed by Modern Hebrew would change its initial [f] to [p]. Even not verbs that have had to undergo morpho-phonological processes (e.g. *fibrek* from English *to fabricate*). The only exception I have found in dictionaries is the colloquial form *pilosofiya* for *filosofiya* ‘philosophy’, as well as the verb formed from it, *pilsef* ‘to philosophise’. Furthermore, it can be argued that *pilosofiya* is not even

a modern borrowing. The only reason why one would still expect *firgen* to satisfy the constraints of Hebrew phonology is that the foreign language form is not known anymore to a major part of the speakers' community, thus no external factor would reinforce the initial [f]. On the other hand, one may claim that [p] and [f] should be considered as distinct phonemes in Modern Hebrew, even if no proposed minimal pair that I know of is really convincing.

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