Innovations in the adjectival morphology of Contemporary Hasidic Yiddish
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Yiddish is considered at risk (CoEL 2018), but it remains the native and daily language of Hasidic and other Haredi (strictly Orthodox) Jewish communities worldwide. Recent work has demonstrated that contemporary Hasidic Yiddish (CHY) has undergone rapid grammatical change since World War II (Assouline 2014; Krogh 2015, 2018; Belk et al. to appear), but many aspects of this variety remain to be studied. This paper examines one such area: whether and how adjectival morphology in Yiddish has changed since the War. Focusing on three themes – the innovation of a distinct attributive marker, the reanalysis of Slavic adjectival stems, and differential behaviour of attributive and predicative Semitic participles – I demonstrate that adjectival morphology in CHY has undergone significant development.

In Standard and historical dialects of Yiddish, attributive adjectives were marked for case and gender, while predicative adjectives appeared without additional morphology (1-2).

(1)   (a) *di kleyne froy*   (b) *der kleyner man*   (c) *mit dem kleynem kind*
            the small.F.NOM woman   the small.M.NOM man   with the small-N.DAT child

(2)   (a) *di froy iz kleyn*   (b) *der man iz kleyn*   (c) *dos kind iz kleyn*
            the woman is small   the man is small   the child is small

However, CHY lacks morphological case and gender, but attributive adjectives are marked with the suffix *-e* (Belk et al. (to appear)):

(3) *(mit) de kleyne froy/man/kind*   (4) *de froy/man/kind iz kleyn(*-e)*
       (with) the small-E woman/man/child   the woman/man/child is small(-E)

This pattern demonstrates the innovation of a distinct and uniform marker of attribution in CHY. This marker is not a direct result of language contact, as the primary contact languages for CHY speakers are English and Modern Hebrew neither of which exhibit such a pattern.

This development has led to the reanalysis of adjectival stems from the Slavic component of the language. Historically, the predicative form of adjectives such as *modne* 'strange' were indistinguishable from certain attributive forms including the feminine nominative (e.g. *di modne froy* 'the strange woman'). However, the innovation of the attributive marker *-e* has led speakers of CHY to analyse such forms as a stem plus the attributive marker: *modn-e*. Thus, in CHY we find innovative predicative stems such as *de mentsh is modn* 'the person is strange'.

In Yiddish in general, predicative and attributive adjectives differ only in inflectional morphology (1–3). However, adjectives derived from Semitic participles are an exception. Historically, adjectives such as *mesuder* 'organized' could be used both predicatively and (with appropriate inflectional morphology) attributively. Optionally, the adjectivalizing suffix *-dig*, which derived adjectives from other categories, affixed to the participial stem in both predicative and attributive contexts. While *-dig* normally does not attach to adjectives, this behaviour is explicable if participles were not fully adjectival. In CHY a third pattern is found: predicative forms of such adjectives appear without *-dig* or any additional morphology while attributive forms appear with both *-dig* and *-e* (Assouline 2017; Belk et al. 2020). Thus, *-dig*, which otherwise cannot affix to adjectives, is required to derive attributive from predicative Semitic participial adjectives, despite the fact that such derivation is disallowed elsewhere.

Taken together, these innovations demonstrate that adjectival morphology in this understudied variety has undergone significant development in the post-War period. The inflectional system is much more regular than in Standard and historical dialects, leading to the reanalysis of Slavic adjectival stems. At the same time, morphological patterns of Semitic participial adjectives have

regularized in unexpected ways. These developments add to the evidence that CHY should be considered a distinct variety of Yiddish, deserving of further study.

References

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