

Yiddish as a Germanic Language

Findings from the Project “Syntax of Eastern Yiddish Dialects (SEYD)”

It is repeatedly claimed that many morpho-syntactic structures of Yiddish are the effect of borrowings from the Slavic languages (e. g. Geller 1999; Wexler 1987). These are structures, such as multiple negation, relative particles or the analytic subjunctive, which are well known from other West Germanic dialects. This contribution will argue that the Slavic influence on Yiddish is overrated and that Yiddish fits perfectly into the West Germanic dialect continuum. This will be shown by analytic constructions (perfect-auxiliaries, subjunctive and comparison) found in data from Uriel Weinreich’s “Language and Culture Archive of Ashkenazic Jewry” (LCAAJ, 1959–1972).

The LCAAJ is the largest source of Yiddish dialects in their old language area in Central and Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, the material was never fully utilized, nor has it been made fully accessible. Thanks to the Columbia University Libraries, fieldnotes from the interviews have now been digitized (cf. <https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/lcaaj>). The project “Syntax of Eastern Yiddish Dialects” (cf. seyd-project.net) uses those written data to describe the morpho-syntactic variation in a large geolinguistic perspective for the first time. The aim of this contribution is to present initial results of the project and to put them into a (west-)germanic perspective.

For example, in the Yiddish dialects we find a similar variance in the choice of auxiliary (*zayn* ‘be’ vs. *hobn* ‘have’) as in the German dialects. Yiddish shows a continuation of Upper German patterns with position and movement verbs (cf. figure 1), and not, as is partly claimed (cf. Jacobs 2005: 70), a generalized use of *hobn* ‘have’ as the sole auxiliary for the past tense.

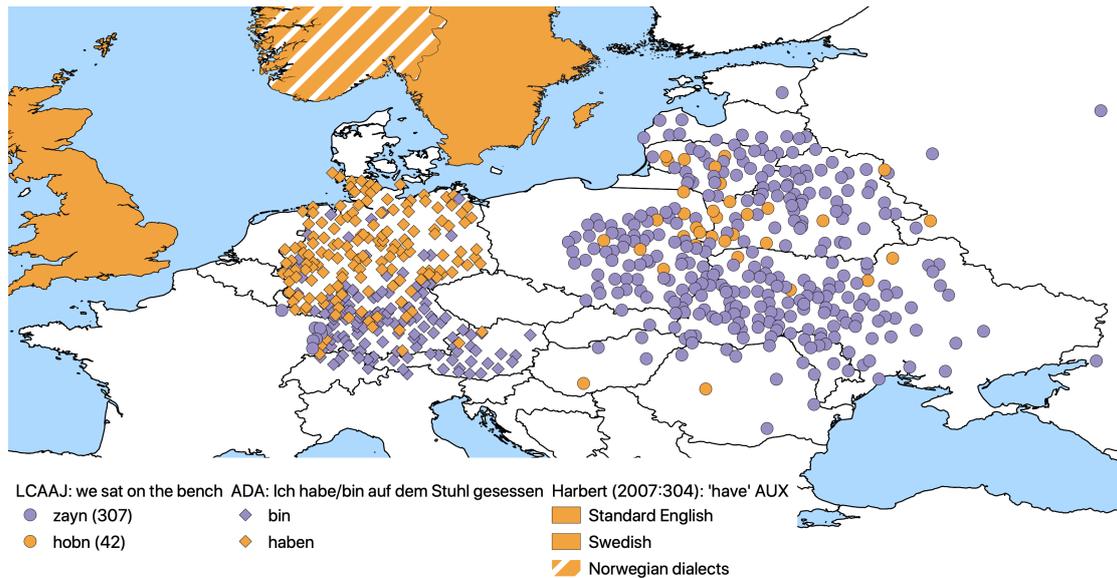


Figure 1: Auxiliary 'have been sitting'

Literatur

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