

FOREIGN LEXICAL ITEMS IN THE LEXICON OF MODERN YIDDISH

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BACKGROUND & AIM

Yiddish has always stood in the position of a minority language spoken outside of any regulation by multilingual speakers, as it would seem, without a strong attitude favoring linguistic purism, and as such has been in an intense interlinguistic contact not limited to intergroup interactions but also on the intraindividual plane, not to mention the religiocultural and sociological reasons for further intragroup linguistic attitudes. It is then no surprise that the Yiddish lexicon in terms of etymology consists of several major elements.

So far there has not yet, at least to the author's knowledge, been conducted any all-round more or less comprehensive research to reach specific figures for how big of a part these elements take up, leaving the topic with only the educated estimates of 70-20-10 or 85-12-3 % (Jacobs 1994) for the Germanic, Semitic, and Slavic element respectively.

The aim of this descriptive work-in-progress research conducted as part of the author's dissertation is to establish more precise and concrete dictionary & text data-based figures in terms of lexemes provided with further arrangement in word classes, as well as isolated roots. A short note on the level of integration of each element is also provided.

DATA & METHODOLOGY

The dictionary data analyzed here consist of 6073 entries from the Yiddish-English part of the 2012 edition of Weinreich's *Modern English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English Dictionary* originally published in 1968.

Each included entry (fig. 1) was transliterated according to YIVO guidelines, converted into an Excel-database entry (fig. 2) with most of the additional information, and further provided with indication of etymology on the level of language family branches. Identification of suspected etymology is based on various intralinguistic factors, author's knowledge of Slavic languages, and the occasional consultation of German, Polish, and Russian etymological dictionaries. Lastly each word has been appointed to a set semantic field. Entries consisting of proper names, spelling variants, abbreviations and words marked as inadmissible in standard Yiddish have been discarded.

The text data consists of 5 news articles taken from the online version of the Yiddish variant of *The Forward*. The articles were chosen so that they have different authors (except for two of them) and so that the topical overlap is minimal.

From the original text, only the autosemantic words (excluding propria) were used in this analysis. Each word was then provided with etymological index according to factors stated above.

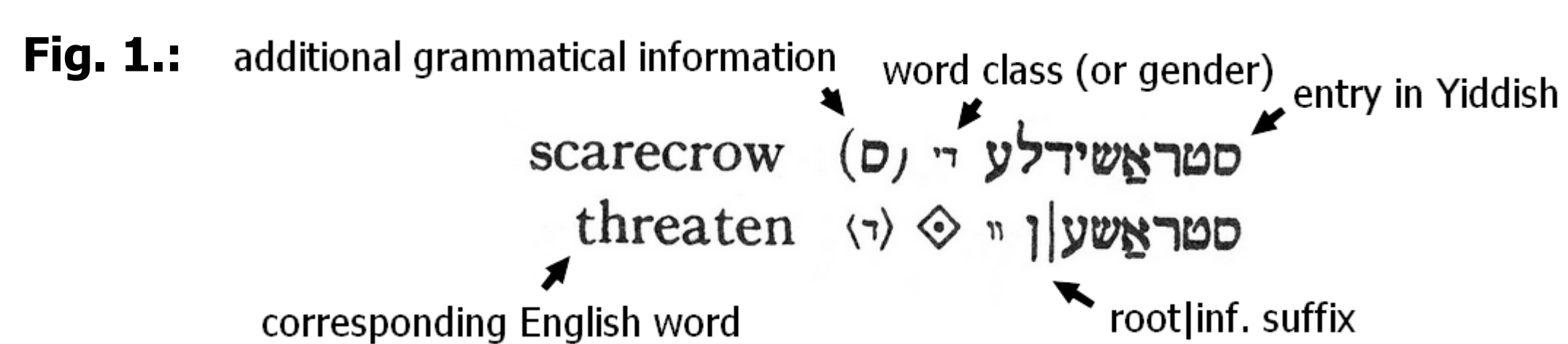


Fig. 2.:

Entry #	in	Entry	Gender	PL / PP	Root	Word class	Translation	Semantic area	General origin
1676	1649	iberkhazern (-Hzr-)		ge-t	HZR	V	repeat	Communication	Semitic
1691	1664	iberkhitreven		ge-t	khitre	V	outwit	Social interactions	Slavic
1796	1769	ibershrek	M	n	shrek	S	scare, fright	Feelings & emotions	Germanic

RESULTS

Tab. 1.: General dictionary data

	Nouns		Adjectives		Verbs		Adverbs		Fun. W.		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Germanic	1458	55.5	736	67.2	1417	77.6	121	44.6	72	72.0	3804	64.2
+ via Slav.	14	0.5	5	0.5	14	0.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	33	0.6
Slavic	91	3.5	26	2.6	121	6.6	11	4.1	5.5	5.5	254.5	4.3
Semitic	304	11.6	118	10.8	60	3.3	131	48.3	17.5	17.5	630.5	10.6
Romance	239	9.1	54	4.9	68	3.7	3	1.1	1	1.0	365	6.2
Classical Ls	282	10.7	102	9.3	72	3.9	3	1.1	1	1.0	460	7.8
+ via Ger.	67	2.5	19	1.7	32	1.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	118	2.0
+ via Slav.	76	2.9	9	0.8	7	0.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	92	1.6
Other	51	1.9	12	1.1	7	0.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	70	1.2
+ via Slav.	22	0.8	1	0.1	3	0.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	26	0.4
Unknown	24	0.9	20	1.8	24	1.3	2	0.7	3	3.0	73	1.2
Total	2628	100.0	1102	100.0	1825	100.0	271	100.0	100	100.0	5926	100.0

The analysis results of the **text data** are presented in tables 5 and 6.

Table 5 shows results for specific articles. Both here and then in derived **table 6**, the proportion of the Slavic element is smaller than in the dictionary data. Such a situation can be caused by either the fact that the Slavic element is present in semantic fields not dealt with in the articles or the fact that many Slavic lexemes are function words that have not been included in this analysis.

Tab. 5.: Preliminary text data

	Article 1		Article 2		Article 3		Article 4		Article 5		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Germanic	282	61.4	298	63.5	124	78.5	219	53.3	329	73.6	1252	64.4
Slavic	24	5.2	14	3.0	1	0.6	3	0.7	11	2.5	53	2.7
Semitic	57	12.4	42	9.0	22	13.9	83	20.2	48	10.7	252	13.0
Classical Ls	96	20.9	115	24.5	11	7.0	106	25.8	59	13.2	387	19.9
Total	459	100.0	469	100.0	158	100.0	411	100.0	447	100.0	1944	100.0

As for the **adaptation** and **incorporation**, it can be said that the **Slavic element** is phonologically quite adapted (except for [lʲ]) and fully incorporated into the morphological system. Neuter nouns are sometimes redesignated as feminine, adjectives are usually loaned in their nominative singular neuter form but regularly inflected, and verbs are also regular but curious in their stem-final *-e*. The **Semitic element** on the other hand begins to stand out already on the level of orthography as almost all of it kept its original spelling. It is well adapted to match the Yiddish phonological inventory but the morphological incorporation is incomplete, nouns mostly retain their original plural suffix which Weinreich (1979) explains rather by pair lexical transfer and a posteriori reanalysis than grammatical interference, adjectives are either used only predicatively or they are equipped with Germanic adjective-forming suffix, verbs are either fully incorporated or they are frozen in the present participle form and restructured as, as Katz (1987) calls them, "inherently analytic verbs" with auxiliary *to be*.

CONCLUSIONS

So far, the dictionary data analysis shows the proportions to be as expected by the original guesses with Germanic base forming the largest part of the Yiddish lexicon, accompanied by much smaller Semitic part and then once again much smaller Slavic part. The specific figures are somewhere in between the two guesses, and while the analysis of lexemes shows figures closer to the latter guess which therefore could be considered a bit more precise, the root analysis is closer to the former one. The latter guess is also close to the results from the text data, however the author is aware that the text data presented here is very limited and thus finds it appropriate to remain careful in generalizing statements. It seems safe to say the Germanic element forms about 65% (or 80% in our further specified case) of Yiddish lexicon both in general and in usage, the exact proportions of the other two elements are to be determined in further research.

DISCUSSION & RESEARCH FOLLOW-UP

Given the debated location of the birthplace of Yiddish, it might also be of value to further divide lexemes of Romance origin into internationalisms, Romance element already present in Old High German, and specifically Yiddish Romance element. Furthermore, where possible, the research would surely benefit from dividing the (neo-)classical element based on via which branch it entered Yiddish.

The author is going to continue this research by expanding both databases, the full dictionary database consisting of Weinreich's dictionary should then be compared to data from Beinfeld & al. (2013); the text database should also be expanded by original and translated literary works of various nature.

It is also planned to analyze the full data in terms of semantic fields.

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