

Scrambling and Phrase Structure in Early and Modern Yiddish

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(Keywords: syntax, scrambling, Germanic, diachronic syntax)

It is well established that modern Yiddish is a Tense-medial (left-headed TP) language (Diesing 1990, Santorini 1992, 1993). The structure of the Yiddish vP , on the other hand, is by no means a settled issue. DPs and nonfinite verbs may be found both to the left and to the right of nonfinite matrix verbs in modern Yiddish (exs 1, 2). These facts have given rise to a long-standing controversy in the literature over whether Yiddish should be analyzed as underlyingly OV with rightward extraposition processes (Geilfuß 1991, Vikner 2001), or underlyingly VO with leftward scrambling of objects across main verbs (Diesing 1997). This paper argues that Yiddish is an OV language, *contra* Diesing (1997), and presents new data from a quantitative, diachronic study of Yiddish in support of the OV analysis. In particular, this study goes beyond previous accounts to show that the constraints on object-scrambling in modern and historical Yiddish conclusively demonstrate that Yiddish is, and always has been, a language with a categorically head-final vP .

Diesing's (1997) analysis of Yiddish as a VO language leads to an unnecessarily complicated and typologically unlikely analysis of DP scrambling, while an OV analysis yields a better understanding of both scrambling and the structure of Yiddish. In order to derive sentences such as (1a) and the clearly scrambled orders in (3a,b) from a left-headed vP , the VO analysis crucially relies on the proposal that objects can scramble leftward across nonfinite verbs from an underlying VO position. The VO analysis thus posits a type of scrambling that is wholly unattested in Germanic, and, we will argue, universally as well. We will show that scrambling languages obey the following generalization: scrambling (including "object shift") may not cross a *c*-commanding head in which a morpheme is internally or externally merged. Furthermore, Yiddish in all stages of its history has unmistakably obeyed this constraint: Tense has always constituted a barrier to leftward scrambling in Yiddish. In modern Yiddish, a Tense-medial language, objects scramble as far as the finite auxiliary in Tense, but never across it (see 4). Early Yiddish, on the other hand, had a right-headed TP, and accordingly, objects could freely move leftward out of TP in Early Yiddish (ex. 5). A quantitative study using the parsed diachronic corpus described in Santorini (1992, 1993) confirms that left-headed functional projections have always blocked scrambling in Yiddish. During the period in which the Yiddish TP was changing from right-headed to left-headed (c.1400-1850), as the frequency of left-headed TPs increases over time, the frequency of objects scrambled past Spec(TP) correspondingly declines. Additionally, unambiguously Tense-medial clauses in the corpus *never* show objects to the left of finite verbs, demonstrating that verbal heads were barriers to scrambling in Yiddish even from the earliest occurrences of left-headed verbal projections in the language. This is in contrast to unambiguously Tense-final clauses (diagnosed by particles or negation preceding the finite verb), for which there are 28 examples in the corpus (see 6).

The analysis proposed here, that the Yiddish vP is right-headed and has never changed, allows a uniform statement of the constraints on scrambling, both cross-linguistically within the history of Yiddish. Finally, the superficially VO surface orders in (1,2b) are plausibly derived from a head-final vP by verb-raising (cf. Zaenen 1979) and rightward extraposition, both of which are attested in unambiguously in historical Yiddish. The VO analysis, on the other hand, is forced to treat the syntax of modern Yiddish as a typological oddity among VO languages, rather than as a well-behaved OV language.

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- (1) a. Er hot **dos bukh** geleynt
He has the book read
b. Er hot geleynt **dos bukh**
“He read the book” (den Besten & Moed-van Walraven 1986: 125)
- (2) a. Er iz **geboren** gevoren in de milkhome
He is born became in the war
“He was born in war [i.e., war is second nature to him]”
(2-4 from my consultant, a native speaker of Lithuanian Yiddish)
b. Vilstu geyn **shpatziren**?
Want-you go walking
- (3) a. Ikh trakht az Hayim hot **dem bikhl** nekhtn nit gekoyft.
I think that Hayim has the book-DIM yesterday not bought
b. Ikh trakht az Hayim hot nekhtn **dem bikhl** nit gekoyft.
“I think that Hayim didn’t buy the book yesterday.”
- (4) a. * Ikh trakht az Hayim **im** hot nekhtn nit gekoyft.
I think that Hayim him has yesterday not bought.
b. * Ikh trakht az **im** Hayim hot nekhtn nit gekoyft.
- (5) d[a]z **es** unzr her gut oyz ginumn hut far an
that it our lord good out-took has presently
“...that our good Lord has made a success of it presently”
(Leib bar Moses Melir’s *Book of Esther*, date: 1589)
- (6) ...das ikh **im ab** zag
that I him off spoke
“that I refused him”
(G”otz fun Fiderholtz’s *Complaint*, in Birnbaum 1979: 159-160, date: 1518)

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