

The syntax and morphology of the noun phrase in Contemporary Hasidic Yiddish

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Abstract

Although under existential threat in the secular world, Yiddish continues to be a native and daily language for Haredi (Hasidic and other strictly Orthodox) communities, with Hasidic speakers comprising the vast majority of these. Historical and demographic shifts, specifically in the post-War period, in the population of speakers have led to rapid changes in the language itself. These developments are so far-reaching and pervasive that we consider the variety spoken by today's Haredi speakers to be distinct, referring to it as Contemporary Hasidic Yiddish.

This talk reports on studies involving dozens of native Contemporary Hasidic Yiddish speakers, and demonstrates that significant changes have occurred in the morphology of full nominals, adjectives, personal pronouns, possessives, and demonstratives. Specifically, gender and case distinctions have disappeared from full nominals, adjectival agreement has been reanalyzed as modification marking. The personal pronoun system has undergone significant levelling in terms of case and gender marking, but a distinct paradigm of weak pronominal forms exists. Independent possessives have lost case and grammatical gender distinctions completely, and a new demonstrative pronoun has emerged which exhibits a novel case distinction.