Bare participle forms in the speech of Lithuanian Yiddish heritage speakers: multiple causation

Abstract: The article is concerned with bare participle forms instead of full-fledged past tense (the auxiliary hobn/zajn + past participle) produced by two young male speakers of Lithuanian Yiddish. In Yiddish, the past tense is more or less isomorphic to the German Perfekt and covers the functions of both perfect and imperfect. The speakers acquired Yiddish and Lithuanian simultaneously in their childhood. Remarkably, in Lithuanian, present perfect auxiliary is optional. The phenomenon of omission can be explained within at least two paradigms: incomplete L1 acquisition (especially in heritage language speakers) and contact linguistics (contact-induced language change). In this article I argue that there are possible multiple explanations because it is unclear how to draw a strict line between incomplete acquisition and contact-induced language change. Comparison with Levine’s study on incomplete acquisition of Yiddish demonstrates that the present informants are fluent, strongly identify with Yiddish and produce no non-target past participles. At the same time, the speech of the informants exhibits Lithuanian impact in phonetics and non-core morphosyntax. While limited input does play a role, it is unclear whether and where the border between incomplete acquisition and contact-induced structural change can be drawn.

Keywords: Yiddish, Lithuanian, contact-induced language change, incomplete acquisition, bilingual acquisition

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1 Introduction

This article is concerned with bare participle forms that appear instead of the fully-fledged Yiddish past tense construction (the auxiliary hobn/zajn + past participle). The named forms are produced by two young male speakers of Lithuanian Yiddish, a variety of Northeastern Yiddish. For instance, as opposed to usual Yiddish ix hob gezogt (I have:1SG say:PAST PRTC) ‘I said / I have said’ or mir zajnen gegangen (we be:1PL go:PAST PRTC) ‘we went / we have gone’, they have...
ix gezogt and mir gegangen respectively. The two informants represent an extremely rare case nowadays of simultaneous Yiddish-Lithuanian bilingualism.

The phenomenon of omission can be explained within at least two paradigms: incomplete L1 acquisition (especially in the context of heritage language speakers) and contact-induced language change. In this article I will argue for a multiple explanation because it is unclear how to draw a strict line between phenomena of incomplete acquisition and those of contact-induced language change. Notably, in Lithuanian the auxiliary in present perfect is optional.

Over time, a considerable body of literature on Northeastern Yiddish has been produced, with much attention given to regional differences within the dialect group (Jacobs 2005 and references therein; Katz 1983). Scholars such as Yudl Mark¹ (1951) and Hatskel Lemkhen / Hackelis Lemchenas (Lemchenas 1970; Lemkhen 1995) have described varieties of Yiddish in Lithuania proper at length. However, due to reasons that cannot be fully considered here there is a striking lack of scholarship on the current state of Yiddish varieties in Eastern Europe. It is true that the number of speakers there has dramatically decreased but, to put it carefully, Yiddish speakers are not completely absent. While existing collected data (especially for the Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry project) has inspired studies in Yiddish dialectology, historical linguistics and typology, the consequences of Jewish multilingualism are seldom discussed and few scholars if any collect naturalistic spoken data in Eastern Europe. Some scholars do fieldwork among remaining Yiddish-speakers in the region (for instance, fieldwork recordings undertaken by Dovid Katz) but the studies are designed in the spirit of Yiddish dialectology with little if any attention towards synchronic contact linguistic phenomena (code-switching, contact-induced restructuring, etc.).

Studies such as Isaacs (1999a, 1999b) and Tannenbaum and Abugov (2010), investigate spoken Yiddish in the naturalistic environment of ultra-orthodox (Haredi) communities, but the sociolinguistic profile, identity and language attitudes of the speakers in question differ to a great extent from those in secular environment. As this is a sociolinguistically very distinct type of community, it is doubtful whether a comparison can be justified. In Eastern Europe, acquisition of Yiddish as L1 nowadays is an extremely rare phenomenon and, to the best of my knowledge, no such data has been collected. The current article seeks to fill the gap at least to some extent.

Outside the field of Yiddish linguistics proper, there has been an increase in interest towards first language attrition (L1 attrition; see Köpke et al. 2007; Schmid

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¹ Yiddish personal names and Yiddish-language titles in the References appear according to YIVO transliteration conventions. For samples of Yiddish, I use a transcription (one sound = one digit).
et al. 2004), incomplete L1 acquisition (Montrul 2008) and heritage speakers (Polinsky 2008; Polinsky and Kagan 2007; Schmitt 2010). The speakers in the current study qualify as heritage speakers; they have acquired Yiddish at home and use it within the family. There is only one study on incomplete acquisition of Yiddish with the focus on auxiliary use (Levine 2000). However, it will be demonstrated that speech produced by my informants is in many respects unlike that of Levine’s informants, and there are differences in auxiliary use as well.

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the informants, their sociolinguistic profile and the data. In Section 3, I describe rules of past tense auxiliary choice in regional varieties of Yiddish and Standard Yiddish. Section 4 deals with the main features of the informants’ speech, focusing on regional features and innovations (including bare participles). Notably, Lithuanian has one auxiliary in the present perfect (būti ‘to be’) and it is optional. I will mention features that can be ascribed to the impact of Lithuanian; all of them are in prosody, phonetics, non-core morphosyntax and semantics. Whereas I am not aware of studies on past tense acquisition in Yiddish amongst monolingual speakers (if such speakers exist at all), in Section 5 I will present relevant findings in research on mono- and bilingual acquisition of German Perfekt, as this tense is more or less isomorphic to Yiddish past tense (classical study by Leopold [1939–1949]; Mills (1986) on acquisition of German; Salustri (2002–2003) on Italian-German early bilingualism; Wittek and Tomasello (2002) on German Perfekt monolingual acquisition). These studies provide useful guidelines as far as auxiliary omission or confusion of haben and sein are concerned.

Further, I discuss Levine’s (2000) account of results of incomplete acquisition of Yiddish. Important differences between the speech of Levine’s and my informants, their sociolinguistic profile and their attitudes towards Yiddish will be examined. Then I show why incomplete acquisition cannot be taken as the only explanation of auxiliary deletion (Section 6). Finally, tentative conclusions will be presented.

2 Sociolinguistic background and the data

2.1 General background

Lithuania was home for a substantial Jewish (Yiddish-speaking) population. It was sometimes called a bastion of Yiddishism. Before World War II, 120,000 Jews resided in so-called Kaunas Lithuania, constituting 7% of the population and being the largest minority (Mendelsohn 1983: 225). While all Jews understood
Yiddish and the majority used it as their main language (Mark 1951: 430), in the interwar period the language dynamics slowly changed and proficiency in Lithuanian grew intensively (individuals’ better command) and extensively (more people knowing Lithuanian at least to some extent and using it). For some, Lithuanian was becoming a language of cultural expression (either alongside Yiddish or even instead of it, see Verschik [2010]). During the Holocaust, the majority of the Jewish population was killed. After World War II (1944–1991) the Soviet regime prohibited the re-opening of Jewish educational institutions in Lithuania. Many survivors and their descendents left Lithuania either during or after the Soviet era; however, a small group of Lithuanian Jews had no desire to leave.

After the restoration of Lithuanian independence, there was an increase in activities and a Jewish school was established (with Lithuanian and Russian as languages of instruction where Hebrew is taught as a subject; Yiddish as an elective became available after the informants’ graduation). According to the population census of 2001 in Lithuania, 4,000 (0.1%) Jews reside in the country (Lithuanian Statistics Department 2002). Unfortunately, the question about proficiency in Yiddish was not asked in the census. In addition to population losses, emigration, etc. that have affected the fate of Yiddish in Lithuania, language shift to Lithuanian or Russian has occurred. There are still speakers of Yiddish as L1, mostly elderly people over 70. Clearly, there is no Yiddish monolingualism and, according to local Yiddish speakers I have been familiar with for more than a decade, monolingualism was not the case in their youth either (the first period of Lithuanian independence, 1918–1940, and the Soviet era).

There is some interest in Yiddish among younger generations; young people (both Jewish and non-Jewish) attend Yiddish-language courses available at Vilnius University. Certain enthusiasts have achieved a considerable proficiency in that language. Of course, this differs from acquisition of Yiddish as L1 or bilingual acquisition simultaneously with Lithuanian. Acquisition of Yiddish from early childhood, even as a part of bilingual L1 acquisition, is unique in present-day Lithuania.

2.2 The informants

My informants, AI and JG, both male, were born in Vilnius in 1990 and 1988 respectively; their grandparents were born in Žemaitija (northwestern Lithuania, Zamet in Yiddish, Samogitien in German) where so-called Zameter Yiddish (Mark 1951) was spoken. Their grandparents moved to Vilnius where their parents were born. Žemaitija is an area of Lithuania where Polish (and in general, Slavic) cul-
Bare participle forms in Lithuanian Yiddish

Tural and linguistic impact was minimal (Mark [1951: 442] notes that many generations of Jews in Zamet had lived among Lithuanian neighbors only; see Zinkevičius [1996: 257–258] on the least Polonized Lithuanian population of the region). The speakers were recorded in 2009 and 2010 (approximately one hour each, both in Yiddish and in Lithuanian; interviews in different languages were conducted on different days); as I am familiar with them, I have also had a chance to frequently speak to them in both languages and to observe them interacting in Yiddish and in Lithuanian in everyday life.

Both speakers acquired Lithuanian and Yiddish in their early childhood. Thus, it is a case of bilingual first-language acquisition, albeit input in one of the languages, Yiddish, is seriously limited. AI speaks Yiddish with his grandfather and Lithuanian with other family members. His grandparents speak Yiddish to each other. JG speaks Yiddish with his grandparents, parents and his older brother but he mentioned they speak Lithuanian at home as well. The informants do not read or write Yiddish. Their speech is reasonably fluent. In addition to Yiddish and Lithuanian, the informants are proficient in Russian and English. English was taught at school as a foreign language. Russian was acquired later in their late teens mainly from contacts with Russian-speakers in Vilnius rather than at home or via formal instruction. They have both attended Lithuanian-medium kindergarten and graduated from the Jewish school (with Lithuanian as a language of instruction) and know some Hebrew but do not speak it. Neither informant has any command of Polish. It appears that JG has somewhat better command of the Yiddish lexicon (fewer lexical gaps) than AI. Both have been exposed to informal registers only. There is some difference between the command of lexicon (AI experienced lexical gaps several times during our conversation; however, see Section 4 and Section 5.2), while morphosyntactically their speech is fairly similar.

The informants value their proficiency in Yiddish and their multilingualism in general. They believe that a perfect command of Lithuanian is important. In their view, they speak Lithuanian as native Lithuanians. During the interviews both speakers mentioned that they had never been ashamed, scared or felt awkward conversing in Yiddish in public. They are not religious and follow almost no traditions but they emphasized that being able to speak Yiddish is the essence of Jewish identity for them.

3 Past tense auxiliary in Yiddish

In Yiddish, there is one past tense isomorphic to perfect in German and covering the range of meanings and functions of both imperfect and perfect. Thus, Zi iz
geforn in štot means ‘she travelled / has travelled to the city’. The past tense forms consist of auxiliary hobn ‘to have’ / zajn ‘to be’ in the appropriate person and number and the past participle. In Standard Yiddish and in the majority of regional varieties, some 25 verbs require the auxiliary zajn. These are intransitive verbs expressing movement, state or change of state (Jacobs 2005: 217; Zaretski 1926: 84): zajn ‘to be’, gejn ‘to go’, forn ‘to ride, to travel’, štejn ‘to stand’, lojfn ‘to run’, blajbn ‘to stay, to remain’, fahn ‘to fall’ etc. Other verbs require the auxiliary hobn ‘to have’.

There is some regional variation as far as the choice of auxiliary is concerned. Mark (1951: 457; see also Jacobs 2005: 70) claims that in Northeastern Yiddish (NEY) some areas have ended up with universal hobn: thus, ix hob gegangen ‘I went / I have gone’ instead of ix bin gegangen. The Yiddish of Lithuania proper belongs to NEY; however, the NEY area displays a lot of variation and encompasses a large territory: the Baltic countries, Belarus, some areas of Northeastern Poland and North Ukraine. The NEY area itself can be subdivided into several sub-areas (Jacobs 2001, 2005: 67). Mark (1951) subdivides Yiddish varieties spoken in ethnographic Lithuania into Zameter Yiddish (the Northwestern area, more or less co-territorial with Lithuanian Žemaitija), Lithuanian Yiddish proper (stam-litviš) and the Yiddish of the Suwałki region. As far as generalization of hobn is concerned, Mark (1951: 457) does not specify the area where this occurs (he writes: men zogt in undzer Lite ‘they say in our Lithuania’); the only geographic locations appear in the connection with schoolchildren in Vilkomir (Ukmėrgė) and Kovne (Kaunas). Zameter Yiddish has given rise to the most northern varieties of Yiddish: Courland Yiddish and Estonian Yiddish (Ariste 1970; Mark 1951: 440; Weinreich 1923; Verschik 1999). In my experience with several NEY varieties, such as Estonian Yiddish, Zameter Yiddish, varieties of Lithuanian Yiddish proper as spoken in Vilnius and Kaunas, and Yiddish of Eastern Belarus, hobn and zajn are normally not confused, nor is hobn overgeneralized. To an extent, distinction between the two auxiliaries may have been retained/reintroduced under the influence of Standard Yiddish but it needs to be kept in mind that not all speakers of Yiddish have attended Yiddish schools and have had contact with the standard language. Thus, Standard Yiddish impact cannot be seen as a universal explanation for the re-introduction of the distinction in the varieties where it was lost. For the post-World War II generation, there was no Yiddish-medium education available and, probably, standard language influence cannot count as a decisive factor.

Be it as it is with the universal hobn in some parts of the NEY territory, two points should be made: (1) no Yiddish variety has past tense auxiliary deletion; (2) in my experience, the confusion of auxiliaries or generalization of hobn is not the case in adult speakers of the regional varieties of Lithuania.
Regional traits vs. innovations in the speech of the informants

The speech of my informants exhibits the following traits: regional features and what I tentatively call innovations. Innovations are either the result of contact-induced language change or incomplete acquisition due to the limited input and use, or both. In any case, a closer look into individual multilingual repertoire and innovations therein is instructive because it provides an illustration of the likely roots of change in a community (Matras 2009: 38). At times, it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between contact-induced language change and incomplete L1 acquisition, as we shall see.

Regional features are characteristic of Northeastern Yiddish (NEY) and, more specifically, of Zameter Yiddish. General NEY features are case syncretism (merger of Dative and Accusative, see Wolf [1969] and Jacobs [1990]), and lack of the neuter gender, for instance: *in di litviše šul ‘in the Lithuanian school’ (ACC), cf. *in der litvišer šul (DAT); *der kind ‘child’ (MASC), cf. *dos kind (NEUT). Gender assignment, definite article use, article and adjective declension is not consistent in the speech of the informants; this topic requires special attention and does not belong to the scope of the present article. The named features are not specific to these particular informants but are characteristic of Yiddish speakers in Lithuania, including those elderly people who received primary and/or secondary education in Standard Yiddish. Features specific to Zameter Yiddish are as follows:

- The distribution of hissing-hushing consonants follows to some extent the Courland pattern of sabesdiker losn (the phenomenon of confusing hissing and hushing consonants that in some NEY varieties is realized as universal s or an in-between sound). According to the Courland pattern, in words of Germanic origin, the German pattern of distribution is followed and š systematically appears in Hebrew and Slavic words (Weinreich 1952: 376–377). In the speech of the informants, Hebraisms have š: mištome ‘probably’, cf. mistame, a šax ‘a lot’, cf. a sax; in addition to that, some Germanic origin elements systematically appear with š, such as prefix/preposition ouš ‘out’ (cf. Standard Yiddish ojs and NEY regional variants ujs, aus, ouš): oušgegangen ‘gone out’.

Now let us turn to innovations. As Matras (2009: 310) shows, the origins of contact-induced structural change are to be looked for in particular cases of...
employment of innovative structures, that is, at individual level. I am not going to discuss in depth lexical innovations and code-switching for several reasons. Lexicon is the most dynamic stratum of language, and in most instances Yiddish-speakers in Lithuania would code-switch for a variety of reasons (see Verschik 2010); this would require a separate study. In addition to that, I am not sure that code-switching behavior as such can be called an innovation because monolingualism in Yiddish was on the decline in 20th century Lithuania, especially from the third decade onwards (Verschik 2010). The informants switched to Lithuanian occasionally during the Yiddish-language interview because of their need to fill a lexical gap. In a naturalistic setting, they would do it for other reasons (emphasis, quotation, etc.) The following example shows a switch to Lithuanian in a highly specific item, accompanied by a metalinguistic comment:

(1) *Ix vil do lebn un arbetn, nor . . . do iz Europos Sąjunga, af idiš ix vejs nit.*

‘I want to live and to work here but . . . it is European Union here, I don’t know it in Yiddish’.

However, the most striking feature of my informants’ speech is the absence of the auxiliary in the past tense: *zej nit gevust* ‘they did not know / have not known’, cf. *zej hobn nit gevust; kejner nit gelernt zix* ‘nobody studied’, cf. *kejner hot nit gelernt zix*. Twice JG produced *s’iz geven* ‘there was’ with the correct auxiliary; I am inclined to see it as a whole expression rather than as the construction auxiliary plus participle for the reason that it is highly frequent in speech and is probably perceived as fixed unit. Otherwise, it is always the bare participle that is produced:

(2) From AI’s interview:

*Zej šejn gevust*

they already know:PAST PRTC

cf. Yiddish:

*Zej hobn šojn gevust*

they AUX already know:PAST PRTC

‘they knew/have known already’

(3) From JG’s interview:

*Nor šrajbn ix azej nit ouš-gelernt*

but to write I so not PREF-learn:PAST PRTC

cf. Yiddish:

*Nor šrajbn hob ix azej nit ojs-gelernt*

but to write AUX I so not PREF-learn:PAST PRTC

‘but I have not learned to write like this’
In the interview with JG, there are 70 tokens and 19 types of past tense occurrences. Given that we were discussing his linguistic biography (see Pavlenko [2007] on the term), which is not long because he is in his early twenties, as well as his studies, friends etc, past tense was not very frequent. I did not attempt any elicitation tasks at this stage because I wanted to obtain recorded stretches of monolingual Yiddish, if possible, and also of monolingual Lithuanian. AI is two years younger and this was probably the first occasion for him to talk about himself in an interview setting, in Yiddish at that. His interview contains 35 tokens and 17 types of past tense. Although geven ‘been’ is the most frequently used participle in both interviews, the lists and frequencies are far from similar. The figures differ because of apparent differences in the speakers’ personality (JG is more outspoken) and somewhat different course of the conversation. Table 1 demonstrates the past participles used by both informants.

As we shall see in Section 5, studies on bilingual L1 acquisition / incomplete L1 acquisition in Germanic languages mostly report confusion of auxiliaries and very little is said about omission. I will return to relevant case studies in Section 4. At this point, several remarks are to be made.

First, during my contacts with elderly speakers (60+) of Lithuanian Yiddish (and of Zameter Yiddish in particular), I have not encountered auxiliary omission, although I do not have recordings and no contact with the informants’ parents and grandparents.

Second, there is no auxiliary confusion in the speech of my informants (that is, hobn in the context of zajn and vice versa), which makes the case different from Levine’s study (Levine 2000). Also, in contrast to Levine’s informants, my informants never produce non-target forms of irregular participles (see Table 1 and examples in Levine [2000: 43]).

Third, Lithuanian, the language my informants have acquired simultaneously with Yiddish, has several past tenses but in present perfect (formed by the auxiliary būti ‘to be’ and past participle) the auxiliary is optional, especially in spoken language: Jonas (yra) išej-ęs (Jonas [be: 3] go-PAST PRTC MASC SG) ‘Jonas has gone out’. I believe that the impact of Lithuanian should be considered in this connection. One may ask, of course: if it is a Lithuanian impact, why then the informants have not overgeneralized zajn ‘to be’, based on the model of Lithuanian būti. To this, I suggest the following answer. Simple past tense in Lithuanian (which has no isomorphic equivalent in Yiddish) is formed synthetically: mes atvyk-o-me (we arrive-PAST-2PL) ‘we arrived’; jis visk-q apraš-ė (he everything-ACC describe-PAST) ‘he described everything’ etc. Thus, it is a one-word item. As described, the form of present perfect can also consist of one word, that is, a participle. In this way, the informants
Table 1: Participles (figures show the number of occurrences during the interview)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>JG</th>
<th>AI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>geven ‘been’</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ouš)gelernt (zix) ‘studied, learned, acquired’</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(arouš)gegangen ‘gone (out)’</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(arouš)gekumen ‘came (out)’</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gezogt ‘said’</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gekent ‘known’</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gelebt ‘lived, resided’</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>geendikt ‘finished’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bakent zix ‘got acquainted’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gearbet ‘worked’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gebilbn ‘stayed’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gešpirt ‘anticipated, felt’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gemejnt ‘meant’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iber)gegeben ‘given (further), transmitted’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gešemt zix ‘ashamed’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gebitn ‘changed, altered’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gedarft ‘had to’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>geborn ‘born’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gefeln ‘pleased’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(avek)gefordn ‘travelled (away), left’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ongevount ‘got used’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gevust ‘known’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gehat ‘had’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(on)gehoubn ‘started; lifted’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gefregt ‘asked’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>geredt ‘spoken’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dercejlt ‘told’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farštanen ‘understood’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gezungen ‘sung’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genejt ‘sewn’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ongefangen ‘begun’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farnumen ‘occupied’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOKENS 70 35
TYPES 19 17

may associate the expression of past tense with one-word items, parallel to Lithuanian.

Of course, it would be methodologically erroneous to postulate only one feature in a variety to be a result of contact-induced structural change because, prob-
ably for cognitive reasons. It would be highly unlikely for auxiliary deletion to be the only contact-induced innovation in morphosyntax. There are other features in phonetics, prosody, semantics and non-core morphosyntax that can be attributed to the Lithuanian impact:

- Lithuanian intonation (especially AI when speaking rapidly).
- Word order in negation of the verb like Example (4):

(4) Ix nit zejer vejs
    I not very know
    ‘I don’t know exactly’

cf. Lithuanian:
aš ne-labai žinau
    I not-very know

cf. Yiddish:
ix vejs nit zejer
    I know not very

It cannot be claimed, however, that word order in negation has been restructured as in Example (4); utterances with conventional word order are attested as well.

- Systematic departures from the V2 rule in the main clause (Example 5):

(5) Dort mir redn af litviš
    There we speak on Lithuanian
    ‘we speak Lithuanian there’

cf. Lithuanian:
ten me kalbame lietuviškai
    there we speak Lithuanian

cf. Yiddish:
dortn redn mir af litviš
    there speak we on Lithuanian.
In general, word order in Lithuanian is less restricted than in Yiddish, which can be accounted for by the more developed inflectional morphology in Lithuanian (7 cases, 5 noun classes, 3 adjective classes, 3 verb classes etc).

- Occasional omission of copula ‘to be’ in the present tense: *du a id?* (you:SG ART Jew?) ‘are you a Jew?’, cf. Yiddish *bist a jid?* (be 2SG ART Jew?) or *bistu a jid?* (be 2SG:you SG ART Jew?), cf. Lithuanian optional copula in constructions like: *tu (esi) žydas?* (you:SG [be:2SG] Jew?).

Thus, there are several features that may be attributed to the Lithuanian impact. According to Thomason and Kaufman (1991: 74–75), slight impact on phonetics, word order, non-core morphosyntax is characteristic of one of the intermediate stages of language contacts in the situation of language maintenance. Of course, on a greater scale shift from Yiddish to other languages has occurred; on the other hand, it is useful to recall the stand of my informants on preservation and transmission of Yiddish.

5 Relevant case studies on auxiliary acquisition

As the very fact that the young speakers have acquired Yiddish as their L1 at home is rather unique in Eastern Europe, it appears reasonable to turn to studies on L1 / bilingual L1 acquisition with a focus on the auxiliary. Although the present case is not that of acquisition of Yiddish as L2, I would like to mention that deletion of the auxiliary has been attested in *Gastarbeiterdeutsch*, immigrant workers’ varieties of German (to name some examples, Keim 1978; Meisel 1977; Pfaff 1981; Pienemann 1977).

I am not aware of any investigations of auxiliary acquisition in Yiddish, but while *Perfekt* in German is more or less isomorphic to the past tense in Yiddish, I am going to discuss some studies on German in order to provide at least some point of reference. It is important to look at the process of acquisition to determine, whether the auxiliary is acquired early or later and whether omission / confusion / overgeneralization of the auxiliary is characteristic of the early stages of language development. Mills (1986) provides a general overview on L1 acquisition of German. Wittek and Tomasello (2002) focus on monolingual German acquisition of *Perfekt*; Leopold (1939–1949) is one of the first classical longitudinal studies on German-English bilingualism; Salustri (2002–2003) has done research on early German-Italian bilingualism and considered auxiliaries important. Levine (2000) has investigated adult speakers of Yiddish, and his study deals with the results of acquisition rather than with the process thereof.
5.1 Mono- and bilingual acquisition of Perfekt in German

Mills (1986) is a frequently cited overview study on German acquisition. She notes that by the age of 3, children use participles but the prefix ge- is frequently omitted. By the age of 4, there are still many errors in participles of the irregular verbs and the auxiliary haben tends to be overgeneralized (Mills 1986: 157). The overgeneralization is explained by higher frequency of haben over sein in adult speech; there are some differences between accounts (see references in Mills [1986: 169–170]) and the age of full acquisition of Perfekt is uncertain since in some studies self-corrections have been reported at the age of 6 (Ramge [1973], quoted from Mills [1986: 170]).

To test Perfekt acquisition, Wittek and Tomasello (2002) conducted a series of experiments with invented verbs (like mieken, baffen etc). Based on earlier studies, they emphasize that production of Perfekt requires more than one generalization (Wittek and Tomasello 2002: 568), since some participles are irregular and since there are two auxiliaries to choose from. Forms of Perfekt in child speech have been registered around age 2;0 but these can be occurrences of unanalyzed imitation rather than independent use. The children produce what they have heard but are not able to form Perfekt from new verbs. The results show that children preferred haben over sein (Wittek and Tomasello 2002: 584). The results were triangulated with the existing German corpora data. In the speech of caretakers on average haben was 4 times more frequent than sein. The mentioned paper does not discuss auxiliary omission. Overall, according to Wittek and Tomasello (2002), mastery of full Perfekt construction in a general rule-based way is difficult: first, one has to form the participle and, second, to choose auxiliary. As we see, researchers differ about the age of complete acquisition of Perfekt.

Werner F. Leopold’s (1939–1949) longitudinal account of his daughter’s English-German bilingual development is among the classical studies on simultaneous acquisition. The family resided in USA, so the input in English was dominant. Leopold spoke to his daughter in German and his spouse used English; the husband and wife would use their respective L1s among themselves (quoted from Levine [2000: 80]). Leopold reports confusion of auxiliaries (with overall preference of haben). Again, no systematic information of omission is presented. The complete set of rules concerning Perfekt was not mastered by the girl; this cannot be exclusively explained with the omnipresence of English but with the attitudes towards German as well. The daughter objected to being addressed in German in public. Levine (2000: 80–83) extensively reviews the study and emphasizes the importance of extra-linguistic factors and identity issues for the outcome of language acquisition. These factors (overall attitudes towards other languages,
informants’ own attitudes etc) proved crucial in his own case-study (see Section 5.2).

Manola Salustri (2002–2003: Chapter 4) compares present perfect mastery in bilingual (German-Italian) children with that in children monolingual in the respective languages. Importantly, she gives some attention to bare participle forms. In adult German, bare participle forms are limited to a set of fixed expressions only (Salustri 2002–2003: 86–87). Of all participial constructions in monolingual German, the ratio of bare past participles differs in four children, ranging between 55 and 99.6% (mean 68%), which is significantly higher than in monolingual Italian (mean 22.5%) (Salustri 2002–2003: 93–94). Bilingual data retained the tendencies of respective monolingual data, which, in Salustri’s opinion (2002–2003: 90–91), confirms the Separate System Hypothesis (that is, development of two separate language systems in early bilinguals). In bilingual data, the auxiliary omission rate is 58% in Italian and 100% in German. The asymmetry is explained in the terms of verb movements that are not the same in two languages, whereas only one type of movement is allowed for German participial constructions (for further discussion of this see Salustri [2002–2003: 97–99, 121–122]).

The discussion by Salustri is significant for the following reason: it shows that both bilingual and monolingual children undergo a stage of auxiliary omission in German. Projecting this onto the situation of incomplete L1 acquisition under conditions of limited input as heritage language speakers (that is, when L1 is heard and used primarily at home, access to formal registers and education in L1 is limited; see Montrul [2010: 11]), this would imply that some speakers do not reach an advanced stage of full-fledged auxiliary use. This, however, is a hypothesis that cannot be proved or disproved at this stage.

5.2 Levine: incomplete acquisition of Yiddish in USA

First, the following clarification is due. There are significant differences in socio-linguistic circumstances (the history of the respective communities) but also in attitudes and identity issues between Levine’s (2000) case study and mine. Yiddish in USA is a typical immigrant language, while my informants belong to an autochthonous minority. He reports his informants to be mostly reluctant to speak Yiddish: general stigmatization of immigrant languages and ambiguous attitudes towards Yiddish among its speakers contributed to the demise of the Yiddish linguistic tradition in USA in the secular sector (Levine 2000: 60–62), whereas in my informants’ homes speaking Yiddish to children was a conscious choice of parents and/or grandparents (as in Al’s case). My informants expressed
regrets that they do not have Yiddish-speaking peers and use Yiddish with the older generation only.

Levine (2000: 75–76) clarifies his theoretical perspective, showing that the speakers had never acquired a full version of Yiddish, which is different from L1 attrition. In what follows I will go through the findings of Levine (2000) and look for possible parallels in the speech of my informants. The following features are mentioned:

- Considerable effort to sustain their speech in Yiddish (2000: 38).
- Non-target past participles and so-called code-blended forms (English stem and Yiddish morphology) (2000: 43).
- Non-target assignment of gender and case (either overgeneralized article de or non-grammatical use of Yiddish definite articles) (2000: 47).
- Mostly hobn preferred over zajn; at times zajn is used grammatically (2000: 73).

Indeed, Levine’s informants had to make considerable efforts to sustain their speech in Yiddish (see excerpts in Levine [2000: 38]). There are lot of hesitations, repetitions, self-repairs and occasional alternations into English. My informants’ speech has a different sound. During the interview in Yiddish they were able to produce stretches of monolingual Yiddish (that is, without code-switching to Lithuanian or other languages). In general, I believe that lexical gaps can occur but these are not decisive, because code-switching is an integral part of speech repertoire of Yiddish-speakers in Lithuania and because lexical gaps appeared in rather specific contexts (university domains, public life etc, recall Example 1). Besides, code-switching can have a variety of pragmatic functions others than filling a lexical gap and the mere fact of presence of other language lexical items need not be indicative of incomplete acquisition per se.

Non-use of Hebrew-Aramaic origin lexical items cannot be explained in a straightforward manner. There is considerable stylistic and regional variation (Jacobs 2005: 70–72). Some varieties of Yiddish in Lithuania, especially Zamet, have lexical borrowings from Lithuanian where other varieties have corresponding Slavic-origin items (Lemkhen 1995: 12). In the most northern varieties of Yiddish (Courland and Estonia, see Verschik [1999]) German-origin items appear where other varieties have Hebrew-Aramaic and Slavic items; the reason being the lack of co-territorial Slavic population and prominent presence of (Baltic) German as a prestigious variety. Levine (2000: 39–40) refers to daytshmerish
lexicon (that is, German items not accepted in Standard Yiddish and looked down upon by language planners) that are present in his informants speech for historical/extralinguistic reasons (such as attitudes towards Yiddish as “corrupt German”). The matter of daytshmerish, however, is highly controversial because many items disliked by language planners have been used in casual spoken varieties of Yiddish (Peltz 1997).

Notably, I did not attest any cases of non-target past participles, be it from regular or irregular verbs (see Table 1). Levine (2000: 43) cites utterances like er hot gehelfn ‘he (has) helped’ (Standard geholfn), mir gobn im gerift ‘we (have) called for him’ (instead of Standard gerufn / Central Yiddish gerifn), ikh hob gezogn ‘I (have) told’ (Standard gezogt), while my informants omit auxiliary but have target participles (also from prefixed verbs where the rules are even more complicated: oušgelernt ‘acquired’, avekgeforn ‘left’, bakent zix ‘got acquainted’) etc.

Non-target assignment of gender and case in Yiddish nouns appear to be the most difficult of all items in the list because they cannot be interpreted in “either . . . or” terms. The loss of neuter in Yiddish has not resulted in a mere two gender system, as Levine (2000: 47) describes it. There exists an extensive literature on the subject (a comprehensive summary and references are given in Jacobs [1990]); the loss of neuter yields a nuanced system with true masculine and true feminine and a range of intermediate genders. The latter category is subject to personal and regional variation. The merger of Dative and Accusative is characteristic of NEY in general, while the North of NEY (an area that encompasses Zamet, Latvia and Estonia) demonstrates a clear labor division between Dative and Accusative forms: Dative for personal pronouns and Accusative for articles (Mark 1951: 454; Wolf 1969: 130, 150). In my experience, all Yiddish-speakers in Lithuania, regardless of formal education in Yiddish or lack thereof, have this trait. It is true that the gender system may undergo substantial restructuring in heritage speakers; for instance, there is a tendency in reduction of the three gender system in heritage speakers of Russian in USA (Polinsky 2008). However, given the inherent NEY case syncretism and gender variation and the fact that some of Levine’s informants come from the NEY area I see a potential problem in distinguishing between this and incomplete acquisition. Jacobs (2005: 70) argues that many varieties of Yiddish seem to be heading toward the erosion of gender distinctions, something that has happened to varying extent in Germanic languages, English among them. Thus, interpreting omission is methodologically ambiguous because omission is not always a sign of simplification, attrition etc. Although it may sound impossible, it has to be decided in every particular instance where omission etc is a result of incomplete acquisition or attrition and where it has to be explained in the terms of internal or contact-induced language change.
As for the past tense formation, the difference between Levine’s informants and mine is prominent: he reports hobn/zajn confusion and a tendency of overgeneralization of hobn, while both my informants have no auxiliary in past tense whatsoever. This striking difference leads to a series of questions: are we dealing with incomplete acquisition in both cases? Are there universal patterns of incomplete acquisition of past tense auxiliary? Or maybe the sociolinguistic circumstances in Levine’s and my research are too different to draw parallels? To what extent does contact-induced language change play a role here?

6 Discussion and conclusions

In the past two decades, interest towards incomplete or interrupted acquisition has grown considerably (Montrul 2008, 2010; Polinsky 2008; Polinsky and Kagan 2007; Silva-Corvalán 1994). Importantly, the concept of heritage speaker was introduced (Valdés 2000). Levine (2000) does not employ the term for the reasons that it was not used at the time of his work; yet his speakers fall into that category: they were exposed to Yiddish in early childhood and to an extent used the language. In incomplete acquisition, the target-like language system was not acquired. Levine shows that his case is not that of L1 attrition. Attrition implies that L1 is fully acquired and then some parts eroded later on (Montrul and Bowles 2009: 264; Schmid 2004).

One may question the concept of “heritage language speaker” claiming that it introduces a new dimension into the qualification of competence in a language, as though emotional identification and ethnic descent has a bearing on the assessment of competence. While positive self-identification with a language and an ethnolinguistic group in itself does not guarantee successful acquisition and maintenance of a language, the lack of such identification and negative emotions linked to the language and its speakers may play a crucial role in language attrition (see Schmid [2004] on attrition of German among Jews in English-speaking environment; Levine [2000] on internalized negative attitudes towards Yiddish as a factor in incomplete acquisition, to name some examples). A useful overview on links between heritage language maintenance, learning and identity is provided by Val and Vinogradova (2010).

Heritage speakers’ attitudes, proficiency, and exposure to heritage languages may vary to a significant measure within a group of the same sociocultural and linguistic background. Different from L2 users, heritage speakers are highly

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2 For instance, the anonymous referee found the concept of “heritage speakers” problematic.
dependent on family and community. Several domains of acquisition/production in heritage speakers have been addressed in the literature, mostly incomplete acquisition of inflectional morphology and syntax, for instance: agreement marking in Hungarian (Bolonyai 2007); object marking in Spanish (Montrul and Bowles 2009), gender assignment in Russian (Polinsky 2008); inflected infinitives in Portuguese (Rothman 2007).

My informants certainly qualify as heritage speakers (and of an endangered language at that), and the context where Yiddish can be used is extremely limited: it is mostly the family and not even a community. Nonetheless, I am hesitant to explain the systematic lack of auxiliary in past tense as the result of limited input only. My reasons are as follows.

First, more evidence is needed because the only point of comparison is Levine (2000) and, as mentioned in Section 5.2, there are substantial differences in grammatical features produced by his and my informants. Even if both sets of informants experience lexical gaps, this can occur in very proficient speakers and even balanced bilinguals in general; gender assignment is anything but straightforward in NEY, and my informants’ speech exhibits NEY case and article syncretism that I would not place under the heading of ungrammatical gender and article assignment; no agreement errors, ungrammatical plurals or non-target past participles occurred. Unlike in Levine’s study, it is auxiliary omission rather than auxiliary confusion or haphazard variation that occurs in the data of this study.

As far as acquisition and usage context is concerned, Levine’s informants probably stopped speaking Yiddish before past tense had been fully acquired. They “have not heard the language regularly since at least their own twenties” (Levine 2000: 20; emphasis in the original), while my informants have been speaking and hearing Yiddish constantly, albeit on a small scale. Levine (2000: 58) mentions one-way vertical communication, that is, mostly caretakers-to-children communication in the heritage language, which is not the case here.

Second, case-studies on incomplete L1 acquisition often discuss simplification (Montrul 2010) as compared to a fully acquired bilingual/monolingual variety of that language. While there can be significant differences between heritage speakers’ varieties on the one hand and fully acquired varieties on the other, the notion of simplification appears somewhat problematic. How can we distinguish between incomplete L1 acquisition phenomena and contact-induced language change? The same phenomena like restructuring of gender system, word order rules, semantics, etc. are object of contact linguistics inquiry. While it is true that second and subsequent generations of immigrants acquire their heritage language under different conditions, their speech is also investigated within various
frameworks of contact linguistics. Are we then talking about different research paradigms and traditions but the same phenomena, or partly overlapping phenomena, or completely different things? A similar question was asked by Bullock and Toribio (2004) concerning cross-linguistic influence in SLA transfer research and contact linguistics.

In a neighboring field of L1 attrition in adults, Pavlenko (2004: 53–54) in her study on adult Russian-English bilinguals in USA identifies four processes: borrowing, restructuring, convergence, shift, mostly in phonology and mental lexicon and concludes that these cannot be unproblematically considered evidence of L1 attrition. In the same spirit, is, the application of Lithuanian word order rules a simplification of deviation from Yiddish word order rules or a typical case of contact-induced language change? In other words, are we viewing this from the perspective of divergence (departure from monolingual norms or balanced bilingual norms) or from the perspective of convergences in a contact situation?

Third, in the case of Yiddish, the following point should be made. Montrul and Bowles (2009: 363) argue that “a given grammar is deemed incomplete when it fails to reach age-appropriate linguistic levels of proficiency as compared with the grammar of monolingual or fluent bilinguals speakers of the same age, cognitive development, and social group” (emphasis mine). I am not convinced that comparison with monolingual speakers is methodologically justified but how should we determine what is completely acquired grammar if there are no monolingual speakers and no fluent bilingual speakers that fulfill the criteria suggested by Montrul and Bowles (2009)? To what extent can the speakers in this study be compared to elderly speakers of Yiddish in Lithuania?

Fourth, in contact linguistics studies on various immigrant languages, the vulnerability of past tense auxiliaries has been reported. Clyne (2003: 118–120) refers to his own and other researchers’ investigation on German, Dutch, French and Italian in Australia and notes overgeneralization of ‘have’. A similar tendency has been attested in Dutch in Brazil and in Afrikaans (Clyne 2003: 229). The auxiliary ‘have’ is much more frequent than ‘be’ and the impact of English in Australia as a sociolinguistically dominant language contributes to the overgeneralization.

In addition to possible contact-induced change and incomplete acquisition, a third set of reasons can be brought. Deletion of past tense auxiliary can occur also language internally without contact-induced change. Consider modern Russian where past tense is, in fact, historically, a bare past participle form; or recall the optional use of the auxiliary in Lithuanian. Also in all of the standard South Slavic languages (Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, Macedonian) there are contexts where the past tense auxiliary disappears: high register prose
and verse, newspaper headlines, idioms/phraseology (Jim Hlavac: 2011, personal communication). From a semantic perspective, auxiliary may be redundant, as past participle form itself is indicative of past tense. Such a redundancy may partly explain why auxiliaries may be affected under contact-induced language change.

Therefore, I favor the consideration that multiple causation rather than limited input and incomplete L1 acquisition or contact-induced restructuring as a single explanation. As Zuckermann (2009) shows, in many cases language change cannot be traced back to one particular cause; rather, it is a result of an interplay between different linguistic (both internal and external) and extralinguistic factors. While limited input, the extremely low number of speakers, restricted opportunities to use and hear Yiddish do play a role, the discrepancies between the results of Levine’s and my case study and an objective lack of comparability (fluent bilingual speakers of a similar age and background) make it difficult to postulate incomplete acquisition as the main cause. The presence of innovative features that have their prototype in Lithuanian (word order, prosody, phonetics, etc) and the optional use of auxiliary in that language call for attention. The question of delineating incomplete L1 acquisition from contact-induced language change remains open, especially where the general vulnerability of auxiliary in contact situations has been widely attested. Finally, past tense auxiliary is semantically redundant; its deletion and/or optional use can be a result of internal development that is not conditioned by limited input or impact of another language.

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Bare participle forms in Lithuanian Yiddish


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