CONTACT-INDUCED PHONOLOGICAL CHANGE IN YIDDISH
ANOTHER LOOK AT WEINREICH'S RIDDLES[*]

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Introduction

With the publication in 1953 of his groundbreaking book, *Languages in Contact*, Uriel Weinreich significantly elevated the status of externally induced change within historical linguistics by rigorously adducing general predictive principles based on solid social, psychological, and linguistic data. Before 1953, contact linguistics had languished, in no small measure due to the priority given to system-internal factors in explanatory accounts of language change by the Young Grammarians and their European and American structuralist successors. As Weinreich and others pointed out, virtually all languages are affected by contact to some degree, meaning that externally induced change is far from exceptional. On the other hand, relative to system-internal change, change resulting from contact typically involves a greater number of variables, e.g. historical, cultural, psychological, a fact which poses a challenge for formulating accurate accounts of how specific changes no longer in progress may have proceeded.

Precisely ten years after *Languages in Contact*, Weinreich took up one particular set of challenges emerging from the history of Yiddish which he collectively termed "four riddles in bilingual dialectology" (U. Weinreich 1963). At the time, Weinreich had begun working on a project dedicated to investigating the extent to which the history of Ashkenazic Jewish contact with coterritorial non-Jewish populations in Eastern Europe might be reconstructed on the basis of (mainly) linguistic evidence. This project,

entitled "Geographic Differentiation in Coterritorial Societies", eventually resulted in the *Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry*, the first three volumes of which have now appeared (Baviskar et al. 1992 (cf. especially pp. 1–2); Herzog et al. 1995, 1999).

As a student of language contact, and acknowledging the fact that bi-/multilingualism was a reality of Ashkenazic verbal behavior, Weinreich naturally looked for patterns of structural differentiation among Yiddish dialects which paralleled what he found in the coterritorial (usually Slavic) languages. While such parallelisms straightforwardly attributable to language contact did emerge, Weinreich also found a number of 'mismatches', that is, structural (in this case, four phonological) features of certain Yiddish dialects which he determined were the result of contact-induced change, but which at the same time were different from the structures of the coterritorial Slavic varieties; hence the moniker 'riddles in bilingual dialectology'.

In what follows, we will review Weinreich's proposed solutions to these four dialect geographic mismatches (henceforth: 'riddles'), as well as some alternative perspectives suggested by Robert D. King. Ultimately, we will offer a modified account for what may have occurred in the sociolinguistic history of Ashkenazic Jewry to produce the four riddles based on current analyses of general contact phenomena, as well as certain facts about Ashkenazic settlement history which have been previously underappreciated. In Section 1 we will briefly review the phonological and geographic facts of the four riddles, as well as Weinreich's original explanations of them based on BORROWING as the mechanism of transfer. Then, in Section 2, we will consider King's alternative analyses for two of the riddles which, though different from those of Weinreich, similarly invoke the borrowing of phonological structure from Slavic into Yiddish. Section 3 addresses the question, can phonology be borrowed, from the perspective of recent work in contact linguistic theory (Thomason & Kaufman 1988; Van Coetsem 1988). The inclination to answer negatively the question posed in Section 3 leads us to consider in Section 4 an alternative scenario for Yiddish-Slavic contact based on what Thomason & Kaufman term INTERFERENCE THROUGH SHIFT (SOURCE LANGUAGE-AGENTIVITY in Van Coetsem). Section 5 provides a summary of our analysis and suggests additional evidence beyond that yielded by the riddles that may support it.

1.   *Weinreich's "Four Riddles in Bilingual Dialectology"*

1.1 *Data*

Let us begin with a review of Weinreich's four riddles, that is, those aspects of Yiddish dialectal phonology where differential patterns of preservation and change have resulted in geographic distributions at odds with what we find in the coterritorial Slavic languages. Though Weinreich's observations on dialectal distribution were made nearly three decades before the appearance of the first volume of the *Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry* (Baviskar et al. 1992), the more precise geographic patterns in that volume largely confirm Weinreich's findings. For the reader's convenience, we will reproduce Weinreich's maps here, beginning with his reference map in Figure 1 (1963: 337). Central Yiddish (CY) is to be located in Poland, eastern Slovakia, eastern Hungary, and Carpathorussia; Eastern Yiddish (EY) is subdivided between: Northeastern dialects (NEY) spoken in Lithuania, Latvia, and Belorussia; and Southeastern dialects (SEY) in Ukraine, Bukovina, Moldavia, and Bessarabia.

Figure 1. *Yiddish area in Central and Eastern Europe*

The first riddle has to do with distinctive vowel length and its distribution reveals one of the clearest differences between Central and Eastern Yiddish. In CY (and Western Yiddish, spoken in Central and Western Europe), the distinction between long and short vowels is phonemic, while in virtually all NEY and SEY dialects, this distinction is lacking (U. Weinreich 1963: 339–342). Though the *LCAAJ* data support Weinreich's observations, in much of SEY there appears to be a length distinction for high non-back /i, ɪ/, but not for /a, o, u/ (Baviskar et al. 1992: 93, Map 44). Examples from (length-distinguishing) CY are given in (1) below (U. Weinreich 1963: 339).

(1)   CY: *shtil* "still, quiet" vs. *shti:l* "armchair"; *fal* "fall" vs. *fa:l* "arrow"; *os* "letter of the alphabet" vs. *o:s* "out (of)"; *shluf* "sleep" vs. *shtru:f* "punishment"

Figure 2 below (U. Weinreich 1963: 340) shows the geographic pattern of distinctive vowel length and the extent of the mismatch between Yiddish and coterritorial Slavic.

Figure 2. *Vowel length in Yiddish*

Weinreich's second riddle is a similarly clear shibboleth between CY and EY, namely the distinction between voiced and unvoiced obstruents in

word-final position. In CY, as in nearly all varieties of German, this distinction is absent, that is, voiced obstruents do not occur word-finally, while in most NEY and SEY dialects, the opposite is the case (U. Weinreich 1963: 342–344, Baviskar et al. 1992: 105, Map 56). Cf. examples in (2) (U. Weinreich 1963: 342).

(2)   NEY: *bord*, *kort*; SEY: *burd*, *kurt*; but CY *burt*, *kurt* "beard, card"

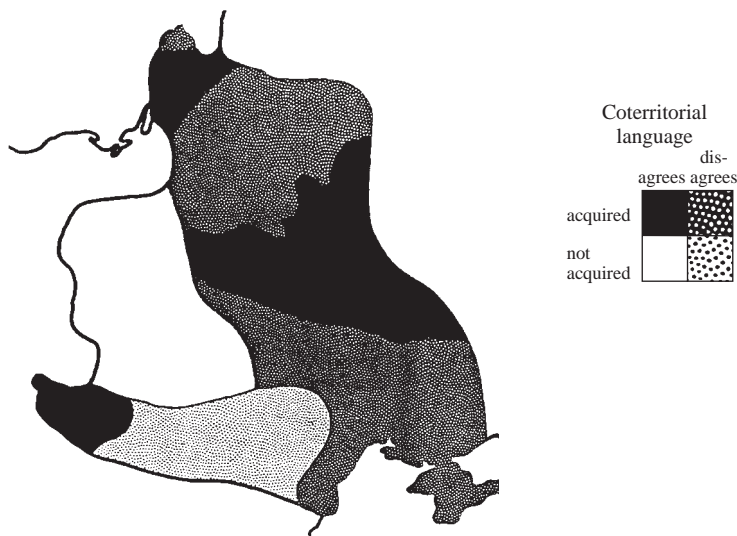Weinreich's map for word-final voicing is given in Figure 3 below (1963: 343).

Figure 3. *Word-final voicing in Yiddish*

The third and fourth riddles deal with: (a) the presence/absence of phonemic /h/ word-initially (U. Weinreich 1963: 344–348, Baviskar et al. 1992: 115, Map 66); and (b) the preservation/merger between the so-called 'hissing' and 'hushing' fricative series, /s, z, c/ and /š, ž, č/ respectively (so-called *sabesdiker losn* "Sabbath language", U. Weinreich 1952, 1963: 348–349, Baviskar et al. 1992: 114, Map 65). Phonemic /h/ is lacking throughout much of SEY and in an area extending northward into NEY; elsewhere (i.e. in most of CY) it is present. The hissing and hushing series have been largely merged in a large portion of NEY (according to the *LCAAJ*, even more extensively than Weinreich had originally observed), but

not in CY. Examples of /h/-loss in SEY (specifically from Podolia in southern Ukraine; Mieses 1924: 91) are given with their German cognate forms in (3); in (4) are examples from U. Weinreich (1952: 368) of former /š, ž, č/ (= ⟨sh, zh, tsh⟩) which have become /s, z, c/ in EY below. Weinreich's maps for these features are given in Figures 4 and 5 (1963: 345, 347).

(3)   SEY: [*h*]*ugl* ("hail" cf. G. *Hagel*), [*h*]*arn* ("wait" cf. G. *harren*), [*h*]*irsh* ("deer", cf. G. *Hirsch*)

(4)   NEY: *kars* ("cherry", *karsh* elsewhere, cf. G. *Kirsche*), *hirz* ("millet", *hirzh* elsewhere, cf. G. *Hirse*), *pac* ("slap", *patsh* elsewhere, cf. G. *Patsch*)

Figure 4. *Loss of /h/ in Yiddish*

Before proceeding to Weinreich's proposed solutions to the riddles described above, let us first make a few general observations about the basic facts.

1.   Regardless of the extent of the mismatch between the Yiddish dialectal features and the coterritorial Slavic languages, the major geographic distributional difference for all four features is between Central and Eastern Yiddish dialects.

lost

preserved

recently
restored

lost in
Polish

Figure 5. *Hissing-hushing distinction in Yiddish*

2.   What is found in Central Yiddish is generally similar to corresponding features of Western Yiddish and German; the Eastern Yiddish data are dissimilar.

3.   Weinreich assumes, and I concur, that these Central Yiddish/Western Yiddish/German-like patterns are or at least resemble historical preservations, while the divergent features of Eastern Yiddish are the result of change.

4.   In each case, the changes which have affected Eastern Yiddish may be understood as systemic simplifications, viz. (a) a phonology which lacks distinctive vowel length is simpler than one that maintains it; (b) eliminating a rule which devoices underlying voiced obstruents word-finally leads to a more transparent relationship between underlying and derived levels of sound structure; (c) the loss of /h/ and (d) the merger of two sibilant series into one together represent reductions in the overall segmental inventory.

1.2 *Weinreich's solutions*

In considering solutions to his riddles, Weinreich proceeds in an utterly logical way, namely by reviewing what we know of the facts of the settlement history of Ashkenazic Jews in Eastern Europe (i.e. in the Central and

Eastern Yiddish dialect areas). For each riddle, Weinreich offers a unique explanation which we will recapitulate briefly. For the first (1963: 350–351), he assumes that Ashkenazim (Early Yiddish speakers)[1] arrived in Poland with distinctive vowel length, but that those who pushed further east lost it "on the model of the local languages" (350). Its preservation in CY Weinreich attributes to later waves of (length-distinguishing) migrants from the west. For the preservation/loss of word-final devoicing, Weinreich similarly assumes that early Ashkenazic settlers arrived in Poland with a German-like system, but here he is much less specific about a possible course of development. For CY, he speculates that either the influence of Polish final-voicing between 1220 and 1450 was either insufficient or that CY did indeed lose the rule under Polish influence, only to reintroduce it later (between 1450 and 1550) with the arrival of new Ashkenazic final-devoicers (1963: 351). To explain what happened further east to lead to the loss of final-devoicing in EY, Weinreich offers no clear solution. Finally, regarding the loss of /h/ and the merger of the hissing and hushing sibilant series, Weinreich assumes the changes first occurred in Poland, only to be "exported" later into certain territories further east. The presence of /h/ and the two sibilant series in modern CY Weinreich attributes not to historical preservation, but to reintroduction under the influence of later emigrants from the west (1963: 352–354).

A few comments on Weinreich's proposed solutions to the four riddles are worth making here. First, he advocates the need to support explanations for contact-induced change firmly in the settlement history of speakers. Weinreich rightly stresses "that an excessively synchronistic approach to linguistic parallelisms in adjacent or coterritorial languages may create artificial riddles which only a detailed historical analysis of the contact situation has the power to resolve" (1963: 357). On the other hand, when it comes to the actual mechanism of contact-induced change, that is, at the level of the individual bi- (or multi)lingual speaker, Weinreich is less explicit. Based on his proposed scenarios sketched above, however, it is clear that he assumes two things: (a) that the Ashkenazic settlers from the west

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[1] I will use the term 'Early Yiddish' to describe the Germanic variety spoken by Ashkenazic Jews who migrated eastward from Central Europe. There is considerable debate about whether this variety should be labeled a form of Yiddish proper (e.g. 'Western Yiddish', 'Proto-Yiddish') or 'Judeo-German'. Taking a stand on this unresolved question is not relevant here, though I will follow Weinreich in assuming that the pertinent phonological data prior to contact with Slavic are consistent with what is found in both Western Yiddish and German dialects.

and their descendants were the agents of change who (b) borrowed, that is, transferred linguistic material directly from coterritorial Slavic languages. Ultimately for Weinreich, wherever change occurs, it is effected through borrowing; the geographic mismatches we find would be due to complicated settlement patterns (e.g. multiple waves from Germany to Poland, and from Poland further eastward) and/or external factors which may inhibit borrowing (e.g. insufficient time-depth of settlement in a particular territory, limited contact between Jews and non-Jews, etc.).

2. *R. D. King on Weinreich's riddles*

Nearly two decades after the publication of Weinreich's 1963 article, Robert D. King began to reexamine Weinreich's riddles and has proposed alternative analyses for the first two, namely the presence/absence of a rule devoicing final obstruents and the presence/absence of distinctive vowel length (King 1980, 1987, 1988). For the third and fourth riddles, /h/-loss and sibilant series merger, King accepts Weinreich's account. Though King acknowledges the importance of invoking external causation in language change and maintains its necessity to explain the two riddles, he complements this approach by relying more heavily on system-internal factors. Further, King sees the two riddles as causally linked to one another.

Briefly, King's account goes as follows. *Contra* Weinreich, King assumes that Ashkenazic emigrants from German-speaking Central Europe spoke a form of Early Yiddish that had already undergone the loss of a rule of final devoicing, but that also maintained distinctive vowel length before the Ashkenazic arrival in Poland. The main empirical basis for King's proposal lies in parallels between this early variety of Yiddish and what he and others believe to have been the phonological situation of Bavarian dialects from approximately 1200–1500.[2] In any case, King assumes that the Ashkenazim arrived in Poland (prior to 1500) with distinctive vowel length but without a rule of final devoicing (as he believes to have been the situation in Bavarian at the time), then between 1500 and 1600 reintroduced

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[2] The 'Bavarian hypothesis' Faber & King (1984) have proposed for the central role of Bavarian German dialects in the genesis of Yiddish is compelling and well supported, though I am skeptical that Bavarian (and Early Yiddish) lacked a rule of final devoicing. I believe that it would also be misguided to assume that Early Yiddish was simply a form of Judeo-Bavarian given that the influence of other dialects (e.g. those from the Rhineland-Palatine region) can be identified. Cf. Eggers (1998: 223–292) for independent support for Faber & King's Bavarian hypothesis.

final devoicing into their phonology on the model of contemporary Polish
and colonial German. As King (1988: 95) puts it,

> I think the favourable Gentile-Jewish situation in Poland during this period
> (before 1650) strongly favoured Polish and non-Jewish German influence
> on Yiddish. It is not far-fetched to assume that Jews, carrying with them
> a Yiddish with vowel-length and no final devoicing, were influenced by
> Polish to keep vowel length and to innovate final devoicing, and by German
> to normalize to some extent the incidence of vowel length in Yiddish.

As for what happened to vowel length, King (1988: 93–96) suggests that the
presence of a rule of final devoicing would tend to promote the maintenance
of distinctive vowel length. On the other hand, the reverse would also be
true, that is, no final devoicing would tend to favor the loss of a long/short
(or tense/lax) distinction between vowels. This latter scenario is what King
assumes to have happened in EY. Ashkenazic immigrants to these territories,
not having been in Poland long enough to reacquire final devoicing, eventu-
ally give up distinctive vowel length, thereby differentiating their Yiddish
from that of their counterparts in Poland.

Overall, then, the crucial difference between Weinreich's and King's
analyses lies in the latter's assumption that a rule of final devoicing was
lacking in Early Yiddish and then (re)introduced into CY, as opposed to
present in Early Yiddish and later lost in EY. Though King also places more
weight on the importance of internal factors in accounting for change, he and
Weinreich share the same basic implicit assumption regarding the mechanism
of externally-induced change, namely borrowing under circumstances of
Jewish bilingualism, the latter being dependent on the relative proximity
between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors. In the following section, we
will address the question of how contact-induced change might plausibly
have been effected in the context of Weinreich's riddles, specifically
whether it is reasonable to assume, as Weinreich and King do, that phono-
logical structures may be borrowed.

3.   *Can phonology be borrowed?*

3.1   *Transfer types in language contact*

Though for decades students of historical linguistics have invoked
language contact in explanations of change, the field of contact linguistics
has too often suffered from a lack of precision. A notable exception to this
theoretical lacuna is the outstanding study of Weinreich (1953) mentioned above.

More recently, two additional works on the theory of language contact have appeared, Thomason & Kaufman (1988) and Van Coetsem (1988), which share the common goal of advancing the pioneering work of scholars such as Weinreich and deepening our understanding of the mechanisms of contact-induced change. Central to both of these recent works is the identification of two primary mechanisms of such change, or, in Van Coetsem's terms, TRANSFER TYPES.

The first mechanism which both models identify is BORROWING, and which Van Coetsem identifies more broadly as RECIPIENT LANGUAGE (RL)-AGENTIVITY (Van Coetsem 1988: 7–23; Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 37–45). Borrowing involves the incorporation of features from a given language (the SOURCE LANGUAGE in Van Coetsem's terms) into a RECIPIENT LANGUAGE (a TARGET LANGUAGE in Thomason & Kaufman) by the native speakers of the recipient language (hence the term rl-agentivity). The second transfer type differs subtly between the two theoretical models. Van Coetsem identifies the mechanism of IMPOSITION of linguistic features from a source language onto a recipient language by, in this instance, the native speakers of the source language (hence, SOURCE LANGUAGE (SL)-AGENTIVITY). Thomason & Kaufman's description of this second transfer type is somewhat narrower. They refer to INTERFERENCE THROUGH SHIFT, a situation in which the source language-speakers, still the agents of linguistic transfer, effect their change onto the recipient language while as a speech community acquiring (shifting to) the recipient/target language.

One major fact which distinguishes these transfer types merits mentioning here, namely the specific areas of linguistic structure which are typically affected in the two types of contact situation. In situations of borrowing (rl-agentivity), for example, the structures which are most susceptible to transfer from the source language to the recipient language are lexical, while structures from more stable domains of language, notably phonology and inflectional morphology, are less likely to be borrowed. On the other hand, in situations of imposition/interference through shift (sl-agentivity), when native speakers of a source language are acquiring a recipient language, it is predicted that the more stable domains of that language (e.g., phonology) will be more readily affected. Both transfer types are well illustrated in a contact situation which is appropriate for the present discussion, namely the Yiddish-English bilingualism of Ashkenazic immigrants to the United States discussed by Rayfield (1970) and cited in Thomason & Kaufman (1988: 40). These

immigrants are bilingual, but Yiddish-dominant. When they speak Yiddish, what is most frequently transferred (more precisely, borrowed) from English is vocabulary (rl-agentivity); when speaking English, they tend to show strong phonological and morphosyntactic interference from their Yiddish, i.e., they speak with an accent and produce sentence structures not consistent with native (English) norms (sl-agentivity).

3.2 *Phonological borrowing and the negative evidence of hypercorrection*

We may now consider the question posed at the beginning of this section in more detail, namely whether or not phonological structures are more likely to be borrowed, in the narrow sense of rl-agentivity outlined above. Van Coetsem and Thomason & Kaufman do not absolutely rule out this possibility, though the latter authors make explicit their belief that "structural [i.e., phonological and syntactic] borrowing" is typically preceded by "much lexical borrowing" due to "intensive contact, including much bilingualism among borrowing-language speakers over a long period of time" (Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 50, cf. also 74–76).[3] Already we should be skeptical that Yiddish speakers borrowed phonological structures from Slavic, given the fact that the percentage of Slavic-derived vocabulary in Yiddish is strikingly low, around 10% according to Jacobs *et al.* (1994: 417) compared to 70% from Germanic and 20% from Semitic sources.[4] To challenge the assumption that phonological borrowing is generally unlikely, we would need substantial evidence of contact situations in which a sizable number of individual adult speakers successfully alter the phonology of their native language (or dialect) on the model of some other language (or dialect). Such evidence, however, is lacking.[5] In all the studies of changes-

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[3] Recent work by Carol Myers-Scotton (e.g. Myers-Scotton 1998) on the putative role of code-switching in bilingual contact situations as a mechanism for structural change may bring into question the necessity of assuming that structural borrowing (in the narrow sense) implies heavy lexical borrowing.

[4] A large portion of the Slavic loanwords in Yiddish have affective semantics, both positive and negative. Cf. examples in (i) from Mieses (1924: 192, 220–222) and M. Weinreich (1980: 527).

(i)   *tati*, *zaydi*, *babi*, *nebekh*, *paskini*, *khrapin*, *sha*, *joj*
         "father, grandfather, grandmother, pitiful, disgusting, snore, shh, ouch"

[5] As Stankiewicz (1985: 184–187) points out, however, there is one clear example of borrowing from Slavic for affective (emotive) purposes in Yiddish phonology, namely 'expressive palatalization' of /t, d, l, n/ and in some regions /s/. Examples from Stankiewicz (1985) of

in-progress by sociolinguists such as William Labov, not a single one has yielded clear evidence of phonological (as opposed to phonetic) borrowing. On the other hand, there is ample evidence of the opposite, namely the difficulty for speakers to alter their native phonologies by adopting elements from outside the system. This negative evidence can be clearly observed in the phenomenon of hypercorrection under circumstances of attempted DIALECT ACQUISITION (cf. Chambers 1992 and discussion below).

A familiar example of hypercorrection is the overproduction of non-prevocalic /r/s by lower middle class speakers of English in New York City discussed by Labov (1972: 122–142), examples of which include *Gord*, *farther* (= "God", "father"). In terms of the transfer types discussed above, how might hypercorrection be described? In the New York City situation, the English variety of lower middle class speakers (here, the recipient language) lacks /r/s in non-prevocalic position, yet these speakers, for social reasons, want to emulate the speech of their middle and upper middle class counterparts who speak an r-ful (rhotic) variety of English (here, the source language (dialect)). Thus, the recipient language (non-rhotic) speakers, consciously or unconsciously, are aiming to alter their native phonology by borrowing from the rhotic source language. Although the desired change would be a very low-grade one from a systemic point of view — no new sounds would be added to the segmental inventory, only the distribution of a single native segment would be altered — the speakers are nonetheless unsuccessful.

The main reason for the resistance of phonology (and arguably syntax) to undergo borrowing is almost certainly a psycholinguistic one. As Labov (1972: 138) notes, "[a]ll of the New York City respondents had grown up speaking an r-less dialect: since they had acquired r-pronunciation long after their primary speech pattern had been established, it was not possible for them to achieve consistency in the use of [the prestigious rhotic variety],

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expressive palatalization for endearing purposes are given with proper names in (ii), while in (iii) we see word pairs which show the alternation of palatalized and nonpalatalized consonants for pejorative affect.

(ii)   male: *Dodye* (< Dovid), *Getsye* (< Getsl); female: *Esye* (< Ester), *Henye* (< Hendl)

(iii)   *lakhn ~ lyakhn*; *shnek ~ shnyek*; *knaker ~ knyaker*
        "laugh ~ guffaw; snail ~ shrimp/urchin; big shot ~ really big shot (contemptuous)"

For a thorough phonological analysis of the phenomenon, see Jacobs (1996).

even in the most formal context". In other words, since the borrowers are adults, they are *de facto* beyond the (likely) critical period for native language acquisition and therefore severely limited in their ability to alter the basic phonological, morphological, and syntactic structures of the linguistic system they acquired as children.[6] In his important article on dialect acquisition, which crucially involves the same mechanism of externally induced change as borrowing, Chambers (1992: 690) has the following to say about the relationship between speaker age and the successful alteration of native phonological structures:

> Between the ages of seven and 14, then, people who immigrate to different dialect areas will vary in their ability to acquire the more complex features of the new dialect. They may, like the people younger than themselves, become early acquirers or, like the people older than themselves, later acquirers. If the latter, they will probably never completely master the intricacies of a complex phonological rule.

Returning to the question of phonological borrowing in the history of Yiddish, in light of the foregoing, it is highly unlikely that Yiddish-speaking adults (who, unlike children, would be sensitive to sociolinguistic prestige norms) could effect such large-scale changes in their native Yiddish (recipient language) phonology by introducing major new rules (e.g. affecting vowel length or final obstruent voicing) or altering their segmental inventory (e.g. regarding /h/ or the sibilants) derived from a Slavic or any other source language. What, then, could account for both the differential changes which Yiddish dialects have undergone and their geographic mismatches with

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[6] A good example of syntactic hypercorrection is the overgeneralization of *whom*, e.g.

(iv)   *Whom did you say was coming?*
(v)   *Whomever has the reddish vacuum, please return it.*

To be sure, there are a number of psycholinguists who question the reality of a critical period for (native) language acquisition, or at the very least certain claims made in defense of it. Birdsong (1992), for example, discusses evidence of apparent native-like knowledge of a language acquired after puberty, the presumed end of the critical period. For our present purposes, I would not claim that it is impossible for adults to develop native-like competence in a second language. On the other hand, ultimate attainment in second language acquisition is, at the very least, not well attested at this point, either at the individual or community levels (Johnson & Newport 1989; Long 1990). The relevant point here is the demonstrable difficulty for motivated adult speakers to introduce change in their own language beyond acquiring new lexical items or altering their phonetic shape (Chambers 1992). Hypercorrection clearly reflects this difficulty.

coterritorial Slavic varieties? In what follows, we will consider an alternative solution to all four riddles based on the second transfer type discussed above, specifically Thomason & Kaufman's notion of interference through shift. Rather than the Ashkenazic migrants to Eastern Europe and their descendants, we will suggest that it was a different group of Jews already resident in the East prior to the Ashkenazic migration, the so-called Knaanim, who were the primary agents of contact-induced change in Yiddish.

4.   *The Knaanim and interference through shift*

4.1   *Who were the Knaanim?*

A fact which has not been widely dealt with in historical treatments of Ashkenazic Jewry is that these Early Yiddish-speaking Jewish emigrants to Eastern Europe had been preceded by other Jews, referred to as Knaanic[7] Jews, whom M. Weinreich (1980: 85) identifies as having come from four major areas: (a) Yavanic (Judeo-Greek) colonies north of the Black Sea, (b) Byzantium, (c) Caucasia (including perhaps the Parsic cultural area), and (d) the Khazar state. Mieses (1924: 287–291), for example, cites attestations of a pre-Ashkenazic presence in Bohemia (tenth century), Moravia and Hungary (eleventh century), Poland (ninth/tenth centuries), Bulgaria (ninth century) and Russia and Ukraine as early as the eighth century.[8] These Jews, as Jews virtually everywhere else, had assimilated linguistically with their surroundings, thus it is possible to speak of a number of Judeo-Slavic varieties in Eastern Europe prior to the arrival of the first Early Yiddish speakers in approximately 1250.

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[7] The stem *knaan-* is cognate with *Canaan*, an originally Semitic territory located in Palestine between the Mediterranean and the Jordan river whose inhabitants were conquered by the Israelites; cf. the common origin of *Slav* and *slave*.

[8] Cf. Mieses (1924: 287–291), Baron (1957: 173–222), Dubnov (1968: 646–663; 790–793), Bin-Nun (1973: 47–49), M. Weinreich (1980: 85–91), Golb & Pritsak (1982), and Wexler (1987, 1991). In these two latter works, Wexler has examined closely the question of Judeo-Slavic (Knaanic) influence on Yiddish and advanced the highly specific claim that Yiddish is the product of "partial language shift from Judeo-Sorbian", thus motivating his labeling Yiddish "the fifteenth Slavic language" (Wexler 1991). Though pinpointing the Sorbian-speaking area may be challenged and will not be supported here (cf. also the responding articles in the 1991 *IJSL* special volume), Wexler's more general claim that the agentivity of shifting Judeo-Slavic speakers profoundly affected the development of Yiddish merits consideration. That is, although it would be helpful to have solid evidence of what language(s) the Knaanim actually spoke, the simple fact remains that there were apparently sizable numbers of non-speakers of Early Yiddish who shifted toward Yiddish.

Though few details are known about the precise nature of the socio-linguistic contact between these two groups of Jews, the immigrant Ashkenazim and the resident Knaanim, one fact is fairly clear: the two groups united and merged with one another with Yiddish winning out as the dominant intra-community medium of communication. Cf. the quote from Seraphim (1938: 376–377, translation my own — MLL) below.

> The [Ashkenazic] immigrants to eastern Europe met up … in Lithuania and Russia with the earlier wave of Jewish migrants from southern Russia and the Crimea who had presumably assimilated linguistically to their Slavic surroundings. The immigrants from the west, as bearers of the "German" language, felt themselves superior to these Lithuanian-, Ruthenian-, or Polish-speaking Jews … For this reason … we find the extremely interesting fact that *in Slavic territory the Jews did not assimilate linguistically anew* … Just the opposite, even the Jews who had originated in the east and had assimilated themselves linguistically to Slavic went over to the use of Yiddish/German, though gradually at first.[9]

The Knaanic Jews thus underwent language shift in the direction of the Early Yiddish spoken by their Ashkenazic coreligionists.

An additional fact which will be crucial to our argument that the Knaanim were the source of interference through shift in Yiddish is a geographic one. Mieses (1924: 289–290, translation my own — MLL) observes that the Knaanic presence was apparently less significant in Poland than further east in parts of the Lithuanian and Russian Empires.

> Russian Jews [prior to the arrival of the Ashkenazim] were incomparably more numerous than those of Poland. The Pole Matthäus Miechovita writing at the beginning of the sixteenth century speaks of Jews only in his description of Lithuania and Russia, not in his sketch of Poland. In the same century, Luria speaks of a rite of German and Russian Jews without mentioning Poland, although he himself had been a rabbi for a time in Lublin.

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[9] The reasons for the dominance of a Germanic-based variety for Jews residing in a Slavic-speaking majority culture were several, according to Bin-Nun (1973: 47–49). First, the Ashkenazim by their sheer numbers quickly came to dominate the Knaanim in a number of regions. Second, the German language already in this early period enjoyed a significant degree of sociolinguistic prestige over Eastern European languages, reinforced, no doubt, by the movement eastward of non-Jewish colonial Germans who often played leading roles in commerce and administration. Finally, a third factor Bin-Nun suggests as important for the success of Yiddish as the dominant language of Eastern European Jewry was the maintenance of commercial and cultural contacts with Ashkenazim left behind in German-speaking Central Europe.

Mieses' observation is supported by Dubnov (1968: 660–663) and M. Weinreich (1980: 89) who attribute the presumed marginal status of pre-Ashkenazic Jewry in Poland to the latter's politically separate status from Lithuania prior to 1569 and its cultural and economic alignments with German-speaking lands to the west. By contrast, the relative importance of the Jewish presence in Kiev up to the earliest contacts with Ashkenazic Jews in the twelfth century is attested to by Dubnov (1968: 791–793). In reference to language, M. Weinreich (1980: 91) states that "[t]here are no Jewish linguistic remains of the pre-Ashkenazic period in Poland; therefore there is no basis for postulating here a pre-Ashkenazic specific-Jewish spoken language".

What is the relevance of this presumedly marginal Knaanic Jewish presence in Poland to our present discussion? If we assume that Polish Knaanic Jews numbered significantly fewer than their counterparts further east, then we would expect to find less evidence of interference through shift in the Yiddish which developed on Polish territory, i.e., Central Yiddish, than in Northeastern and Southeastern Yiddish dialects. Indeed, herein lies the key to understanding the geographic patterns involved with Weinreich's riddles.

4.2 *The Knaanim as agents of interference through shift*

The sociolinguistic scenario we have during the early stages of Ashkenazic-Knaanic contact (ca. 1250–1500) is the following. There were two speech communities in contact with one another:

 1. native Early Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazic Jews who maintained Yiddish while also becoming bilingual in the coterritorial Slavic languages, and
 2. native (Judeo-)Slavic-speaking Knaanic Jews for whom Yiddish was a target language which they acquired while also maintaining knowledge of the coterritorial Slavic languages.

It was this second group, the Slavic (sl)-dominant learners of Yiddish (rl) who would have been responsible for interference through shift in the

development of Yiddish.[10] At this point, it is worth considering what the most likely structural consequences of sl-agentivity/interference through shift might be. As both Van Coetsem (1988: 46–76) and Thomason & Kaufman (1988: 145–146) point out, this transfer type is essentially analogous to (natural) second language acquisition. In the process of acquiring (or shifting toward) a recipient/target language, adult learners may do one of three things: (a) acquire an rl structure perfectly; or they may produce an error involving (b) the direct transfer of an sl structure which is absent in the rl, or (c) the innovation of a structure found neither in the rl or the sl (cf. also Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 129–131). Learners' errors of this latter type often (though not always) result in systemic simplification (REDUCTION in Van Coetsem ibid.). On the basis of a thorough review of apparent cases of interference through shift, Thomason & Kaufman (1988: 131) make the predictive claim that learners' errors are more likely to be structurally simplificatory rather than complicating.

> Although, as we have argued, interference through shift is in general more likely to simplify the T[arget] L[anguage] than to complicate it (at least in cases of slight to moderate interference), we have more clear examples of complicating changes in the phonology and the morphology. We retain (at least for the present) our general prediction in the face of this counter-evidence because we suspect that the preponderance of complicating changes is due to the greater difficulty of establishing interference as the cause of simplificatory changes …

In summarizing their views on the typical consequences of contact under the circumstances of the two transfer types, Thomason & Kaufman (1988: 212) offer the following insights to help the investigator decide *post hoc* which type of contact situation is most likely to have occurred.

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[10] Doubtless, Knaanic modification of Yiddish through shift would have been reinforced by the accommodation of their Ashkenazic counterparts to facilitate communication, thereby allowing innovative features to eventually be acquired by children. It would not be surprising that a people living in what were generally hostile surroundings should not have taken a strongly normative approach to the linguistic innovations initiated by the Slavic-dominant minority among them. A further factor which would have been favorable to the divergence of Yiddish from German(ic) norms would have been the increased social separation of Jews from their non-Jewish German-speaking neighbors, both in Central Europe, as well as in the colonial settlements of the east.

> … [I]n shift-induced interference lexical diffusion may be negligible, and in any case phonological and syntactic interference will be more substantial than lexical interference, unless, as is sometimes the case, the native speakers of the target language borrow features from the language of the shifting population while the shifting population is shifting to the TL. By contrast, lexical diffusion is always first and most extensive in cases of borrowing. One retrospective implication of this difference is that a case in which structural interference is firmly established, while loanwords are few or nonexistent, must be the result of language shift, not borrowing.

Such a case of structural interference, here phonological, in the absence of a sizable number of loanwords, is what we are confronted with in the Yiddish-Slavic contact situation, i.e. interference through shift and not borrowing. Contact-induced change has indeed occurred to produce the innovations Weinreich described in EY phonology, but with Knaanim, rather than Ashkenazim, as the agents of that change. In the following section, we will summarize our claim and consider other possible examples of simplificatory structural interference in EY beyond the four riddles.

5. *Conclusions*

We can summarize our analysis of the origins of Weinreich's four riddles in the following eight points.

1. As Weinreich did, we can assume that the Ashkenazim arrived in Eastern Europe speaking an Early Yiddish which had:
    i.   distinctive vowel length
    ii.   a rule of word-final obstruent devoicing
    iii.   /h/
    iv.   two sibilant series, /s, z, c/ and /š, ž, č/.

2. When they arrived, the Ashkenazim came into contact and eventually merged with Slavic-speaking Jews, the Knaanim, whose numbers were greater east of Poland.

3. Owing to the prestige of the Ashkenazic newcomers, the Knaanim shifted in the direction of Yiddish.

4. As often happens in interference through shift situations, the Knaanic leaners of Yiddish produced errors, i.e. innovated structural patterns different from what was in Early Yiddish.

5. Learners' errors in shift situations are more likely to be simplificatory rather than complicating.

6. The phonological innovations found in Yiddish dialects east of Poland
   are all simplificatory, namely:
   i.   loss of distinctive vowel length
   ii.   loss of a rule of word-final obstruent devoicing
   iii. loss of /h/
   iv.   loss of /š, ž, č/.

7. The proposition that Ashkenazim effected change in their Yiddish
   through borrowing is less plausible than assuming interference through
   shift because
   i.   when major structural borrowing occurs, it almost invariably
         follows massive lexical borrowing — that has not been the case in
         Yiddish, where Slavic-derived loans are relatively few in number;
   ii.   the psycholinguistic constraints imposed on post-critical period
         speakers considerably hinders them from successfully effecting
         structural change in their native variety, even when the socio-
         linguistic motivation to do so may be great — hypercorrection is
         evidence of their lack of success.

8. The reason there are phonological mismatches between Yiddish dialects
   and the coterritorial Slavic varieties is that the mechanism for direct
   transfer from Slavic into Yiddish is lacking. Structural borrowing from
   Slavic is unlikely for the reasons cited in 7; interference through shift
   is likely to result in simplificatory innovations rather than the direct
   transfer of source language structures into a recipient language.

At this point, it is worth asking whether there might not be any other
phonological differences between CY and EY apart from the four riddles
which may support our analysis of simplificatory change under circumstances
of Knaanic interference through shift. In fact, in the *LCAAJ* data there is
evidence for the loss in EY of two additional segments, /v/ and /j/, in certain
environments. Throughout much of SEY, postconsonantal /v/ and, to a
somewhat lesser degree, postvocalic /v/ have been lost (Baviskar et al.
1992: 43, Map 75, p. 124). For CY, only a single lexical item, *c*[*v*]*ishn*
("between" cf. G. *zwischen*) shows this loss. Examples from Baviskar et al.
(1992: 43) are given in (5).

(5)   *c*[*v*]*elf* ("twelve" cf. G. *zwölf*), *gut no*[*v*]*nt* ("good evening" cf.
       G. *Guten Abend*)

For /j/, Baviskar et al. (1992: 41–42, Map 67, p. 116) note its loss immediately preceding /i/ in virtually all of easternmost Yiddish; examples (from Map 67, p. 116) are given in (6).

(6)   [*j*]*id* "Jew, guy", [*j*]*idish* "Jewish, Yiddish", [*j*]*ingl* "boy"

Thus we have two more pieces of phonological evidence to consider. Further, it is important to remember Thomason & Kaufman's observations that major structural change due to interference through shift typically includes syntax, as well. There are a number of areas of Yiddish syntactic structure which may be viewed as simplificatory innovations vis-à-vis Early Yiddish input, but too little is known about the geographic distribution of competing variants to include them in the present analysis. This will be an important task for future work.

Although the analysis presented here differs from those formulated by Weinreich and King, the areas of methodological common ground are important. Both scholars are right to stress the reality of language contact in historical change but also to remind us that contact must be invoked with caution, based on an understanding of the external history of actual speakers. Furthermore, King does well to point out that any externally-induced change must be viewed from the perspective of the linguistic system which is being affected.[11] Yet on those occasions when it seems reasonable to assume that contact plays a role in effecting a particular change, it is absolutely necessary to consider the precise circumstances of speakers' bilingual behavior. How have they acquired the languages in question, e.g. as children or adults? What are the major situational factors which determine the use of languages, including prestige, communication with monolingual speakers of one particular language, patterns of code-switching, etc.? Is community-wide bilingualism relatively stable, i.e. does it persist over a number of generations, or is rapid shift in evidence? Only when one is able to offer answers to some of these questions is one able to determine which of the two basic transfer types, borrowing (in the narrow sense) or imposition/interference through shift, is at play. From this, knowing whether one or the other transfer type would be the likely mechanism of linguistic transfer limits our options for explanations.

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[11] King's observation regarding the phonetic connection between vowel length and consonantal voicing may well explain why the two features pattern so closely with one another in the Yiddish dialectal landscape.

In the case of Yiddish, the apparent unlikelihood of phonological borrowing understood as the attempt by adult speakers to alter some structural aspect of their native language leads us to look elsewhere for the causes of phonological change in Yiddish. Furthermore, it must not be overlooked that interference through shift need not automatically imply the direct transfer, i.e. imposition of elements from one language onto another, but may also result in 'third path effects', i.e., innovative structures which are found in neither the source nor target languages, due to faulty adult acquisition.

It is certainly true that much remains to be known about Knaanic verbal behavior, including precisely what languages they spoke in what regions. With that kind of knowledge, we might be able to entertain the possibility that Knaanic influence on developing Yiddish may indeed have been the result of the direct transfer, i.e., imposition, of structures from native Knaanic-Slavic languages. But the undeniable fact of their existence in numbers significant enough to be noted by historians, as well as the fact that they underwent community-wide shift in the direction of Yiddish nonetheless permits us to look for parallels with other comparable contact situations.[12] In any case, it is hoped that future work on Yiddish will yield more information about Knaanic-Ashkenazic history, as well as further data of interdialectal patterns of structural variation, thereby clarifying our understanding of the development of Yiddish and contact-induced change generally.

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[12] It may be instructive to compare the Yiddish situation, whose genesis and development have clearly involved both the genetic transmission of input from native-speaking parents to children (the Ashkenazim) as well as the shift of adult non-native speakers (the Knaanim), to similar contact situations sometimes described in the creole literature as SEMI-CREOLES (Holm 1988: 9–10). Two examples of such comparable situations would be Afrikaans and Brazilian Portuguese, especially their non-standard varieties.

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SUMMARY

This paper investigates contact-induced change in Yiddish on the example of four problematic sets of phonological data from Yiddish dialectology first discussed by Uriel Weinreich (1963). These data, dubbed "riddles in bilingual dialectology" by Weinreich, are problematic for the fact that contact between Yiddish and coterritorial Slavic languages would appear to be responsible for patterns of variation between Yiddish dialects, yet the Yiddish structures in many regions differ from the coterritorial Slavic patterns. Weinreich explains these mismatches as the result of early borrowing into Yiddish from Slavic which was obscured by later complicated patterns of Jewish migration within Eastern Europe. Here, I will offer an alternative account based on Thomason & Kaufman's (1988) notion of interference through shift, whereby it was Slavic-speaking Jews, the Knaanim, who were the primary agents of structural change in Yiddish.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine le phénomène du changement structurel en yiddish résultant du contact. On examine ce contact du point de vue de quatre ensembles de données de la dialectologie yiddish, discutés pour la première fois par Uriel Weinreich en 1963. Ces données, caractérisées d'"énigmes de la dialectologie yiddish" par Weinreich, sont problématiques parce que les différences inter-dialectales semblent être le produit du contact entre le yiddish et les langues slaves coterritoriales; pourtant, dans plusieurs régions, les structures yiddish ne s'accordent pas avec les structures correspondantes dans les langues slaves pertinentes. Weinreich explique ces fausses correspondances comme des conséquences des anciens emprunts linguistiques du slave en yiddish. Ces emprunts sont devenus obscurs en raison des déplacements subséquents des juifs en Europe orientale. Je propose dans cette contribution une toute autre explication basée sur le concept d'"interférence par assimilation" de Thomason & Kaufman (1988), qui met en relief les juifs de langue slave, les Knaanim, qui étaient les vrais agents du changement structurel en yiddish.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit dem Phänomen des durch Kontakt verursachten Wandels in der Geschichte des Jiddischen. Dieser Wandel wird am Beispiel von vier problematischen Datenmengen aus der jiddischen Dialektologie untersucht, die zuerst von Uriel Weinreich 1963 besprochen wurden. Diese Daten, von Weinreich "Rätsel der bilingualen Dialektologie" genannt, sind problematisch dadurch, dass die innerjiddisch-dialektalen Unterschiede durch Kontakt zwischen Jiddisch und den koterritorialen slawischen Sprachen verursacht zu sein scheinen; trotzdem unterscheiden sich in vielen Gebieten die jiddischen Strukturen von ihren Entsprechungen in den jeweiligen slawischen Sprachen. Weinreich erklärt die fehlenden Übereinstimmungen als Folgen früherer Entlehnungen aus dem Slawischen ins Jiddische, die durch die späteren Wanderungen der Juden innerhalb Osteuropas jetzt schwer nachzuvollziehen sind. In diesem Artikel biete ich eine alternative Erklärung an, die auf dem Grundgedanken der "Interferenz durch Sprachverschiebung" von Thomason & Kaufman (1988) beruht, wobei es hauptsächlich die slawischsprechenden Juden, die Knaanim, waren, die den strukturellen Wandel im Jiddischen herbeigeführt haben.