

The Sociolinguistic Setting of Swiss Yiddish and the Impact on its Grammar

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1 Western Yiddish

If one thinks of Yiddish, one thinks basically of the language of the eastern European Jews. It is much less known that there once was a western counterpart to this linguistic entity—so-called Western Yiddish. Whereas Eastern Yiddish is roughly co-territorial with Slavic languages, Western Yiddish is roughly co-territorial with German. In modern times, there are huge differences between Eastern and Western Yiddish, as far as their sociolinguistic setting is concerned. However, at least in pre-modern times, Western Yiddish is nothing but a western sibling of Eastern Yiddish, and there are linguistic connections between the two.

Yiddish dialects are classified according to the historical development of the vowel phoneme system. For Proto-Yiddish, five different vowel qualities have been reconstructed, the three cardinal vowels */a/, */i/, */u/, and the two mid vowels */e/ and */o/. For four of these vowels, a phonemic length contrast existed, but one of them, namely */a/, existed only as a short vowel. The vowel phoneme system showed thus a structural irregularity:

- (1) The proto-system with this glaring hole in the pattern—the historically short *a is unmatched by a long partner of the same quality—is here at the pivotal point from which the major differentiation of the Yiddish dialects will proceed. The subsequent development of the dialects may be seen as varying regional responses to this original structural weakness. (LCAAJ 1:14)

In Western Yiddish, a monophthongization of two historical diphthongs made the phonological system more regular: The vowels corresponding to Middle High German *ei* and *ou* both merged into /a:/, thus filling the “glaring hole”. In Swiss Yiddish, which is one of the best preserved and best documented Western Yiddish dialects, this development can be illustrated with the words *ta:l* ‘part’, displaying Middle High German *ei* (cf. Middle High German *teil*, Standard German *Teil*, Eastern Yiddish *teyl*), and *a:x* ‘also’, displaying Middle High German *ou* (cf. Middle High German *ouch*, Standard German *auch*, Standard Yiddish *oykh*; both examples from Gug-

genheim 1966:10).¹ Other Yiddish dialects reacted differently to the structural weakness of the Proto-Yiddish vowel system (the most radical means is to eliminate phonemic length contrast from the system altogether, as the dialects called North-Eastern Yiddish have done).

When it comes to the sociolinguistic setting of Eastern and Western Yiddish in modern times, huge differences are observed. Whereas Eastern Yiddish at the beginning of the 20th century was fully living, Western Yiddish had in large parts of its former territory been given up in favor of German. This process of language shift, which is often linked to historical developments such as the emancipation, assimilation, and urbanization of the western European Jews, began in certain areas already in the late 18th century and led to the extinction of Western Yiddish in many areas. The different sociolinguistic settings can be described as follows:

- (2) On the eve of the Second World War, the status of Yiddish in most of Western Europe was hardly comparable to that of Yiddish in Eastern Europe. Eastern Yiddish was the living idiom of nearly 7 million Jews in Eastern Europe alone, and of over 10.5 million worldwide. It had, moreover, become a vehicle for intense literary creativity. Western Yiddish, on the other hand, had been almost extinguished in the face of the penetration of both regional and Standard German into the ashkenazic communities, and remained an everyday idiom only in a few areas on the western and eastern fringes of the German language area. (LCAAJ 1:10)

For that reason, modern Western Yiddish is only scarcely documented. It was covered by the LCAAJ, but the questionnaire used for western informants was much shorter than the eastern questionnaire, and many informants from Germany could not be viewed as native speakers of Western Yiddish.

¹A note on the transcriptions used in this paper: All data from Swiss Yiddish are taken from Guggenheim (1966), but the transcription used there (which is a phonemic transcription that includes some allophonic variance and makes some compromises to Standard German spelling rules) is changed into the IPA system, eliminating some of the allophonic differentiations of Guggenheim (1966). In Swiss Yiddish, there are no voiced plosives and fricatives; the respective IPA symbols stand for a weaker grade of the respective unvoiced sounds (usually referred to as *lenis*), thus, e.g. *d* stands for [d̥], or *z* stands for [z̥]. This remark also holds for the transcription of Swiss German. Examples from Eastern (Standard) Yiddish are rendered according to the YIVO-transliteration (see Jacobs et al. 1994: 400 for a table showing the basic correspondences). The most important equivalents between <YIVO> and [IPA] are: <ay, ey, oy> = [ai, ei, oi], <kh> = [x], <sh> = [ʃ], <zh> = [ʒ].

With respect to the above discussed criterion, it has to be stated that “the phonological feature that has been considered criterial to the delimitation of W[estern] Y[iddish] itself—*ā* in words like *hām* ‘home’ and *kāfen* ‘to buy’—is heard only infrequently; in the speech of many informants it is completely lacking.” (Lowenstein 1969:34).

Every documented modern Western Yiddish variety is very important for our knowledge of Western Yiddish in general. Weinreich (1958) suggests a corpus study for those areas where Western Yiddish had been given up early; he shows that by using printed materials basically from the 19th century, a lot of information about Western Yiddish can indeed be reconstructed. As Weinreich (1958:162) points out, however, it makes sense to begin any research in the field of modern Western Yiddish by examining the remaining spoken dialects, since this allows for the most direct access to this scarcely documented branch of Yiddish.

One of the few Western Yiddish dialects still living in the 20th century is the variety spoken in Switzerland. The fact that the phonological criterion used to delimitate Western Yiddish is well documented in Swiss Yiddish whereas it is rare among German informants (see above) may already show that the Swiss data are more archaic than many other sources (cf. 2.4). In this paper, I will more closely examine the sociolinguistic setting of this particular Western Yiddish dialect (section 2), paying special attention to its effects on the grammar (section 3). If we can determine which parts of Swiss Yiddish grammar are due to German influence, we then can determine the presumably original Western Yiddish part and gain considerable knowledge about modern Western Yiddish grammar more generally. Furthermore, some insight in the relations between Western Yiddish and German might be gained; these relations are poorly understood so far:

- (3) The degree to which the history of Western Yiddish dialects is independent of the history of German dialects remains to be investigated. (LCAAJ 1:10)

2 The Sociolinguistic Setting of Swiss Yiddish

2.1 Historical Background

Since the end of the 17th century Jews were for quite a long time allowed to settle only in two villages in the territory of Switzerland, namely, Endingen and Lengnau (see Weldler-Steinberg, 1966). They are situated some 25 kilometers to the north-west of Zurich, in the valley of the river Surb (this valley is called *Surbtal* in German, the Yiddish dialect is usually called *Surbtaler*

Surbtaler Jiddisch). These Jewish communities are quite typical for the so-called “rural Jewry”, which was the basic form of Jewish life in many other parts of the German-speaking area for quite a long time, too, in southern Germany, for instance. The Swiss Jewish communities had close contacts with Jewish communities in Alsace and southern Germany, and until the 19th century led an existence with relatively few contacts to the surrounding culture.

The original vernacular of the Swiss Jews was a Western Yiddish dialect, presumably quite similar to Western Yiddish dialects spoken in southern Germany and in Alsace; the Swiss variety in particular was very well preserved up until the 20th century. One important factor for this lies without doubt in the fact that traditional rural Jewish life remained intact relatively long in Switzerland (see Guggenheim, 1966:4). Urbanization, emancipation, assimilation were all important developments for Swiss Jewry in the 19th century, but later than in other parts of western Europe (this holds primarily with respect to France and northern parts of Germany, less so with respect to southern Germany and Austria). Jews in Switzerland were granted the right to settle in larger numbers in certain areas outside the Surbtal only around 1850, and freedom of movement throughout Switzerland was granted only in 1866 (see Weldler-Steinberg, 1970, especially chapter XVI). In the second half of the 19th century, linked to the historical developments just outlined, the population of the rural Jewish communities began to dwindle (see Weldler-Steinberg, 1970:179) and the Western Yiddish dialect was gradually given up. However, in the 1950s and 1960s there were still more than a dozen native speakers, most of them born in the 1870s and 1880s, who had acquired Western Yiddish as their first language. Valuable work was carried out by Florence Guggenheim-Grünberg, a Swiss researcher whose husband had some native competence in Swiss Yiddish. Guggenheim-Grünberg documented Swiss Yiddish just before it became extinct; today there are no native speakers.

2.2 Differences from the Co-Territorial German Dialects

A language-internal reason for the good preservation of Swiss Yiddish might be seen in the fact that the German dialects spoken in Switzerland, in particular the High Alemannic² dialects, the primary contact language for Swiss

²The German dialects spoken in Switzerland belong to four different dialect groups (namely, Low Alemannic, High Alemannic, Highest Alemannic, and Southern Bavarian), none of which is restricted to Switzerland. The term *Swiss German* as a cover for all German dialects in Switzerland is nevertheless appropriate when it

Yiddish, are quite different from Western Yiddish. There are actually greater differences between High Alemannic and Western Yiddish than there are between most other High German dialects and Western Yiddish. Since in section 3, I will only consider morphological and syntactic phenomena, I will mention here some major phonological differences.

Whereas the Middle High German high diphthongs *ie*, *üe*, *uo* were monophthongized in Central German dialects (see Schirmunski, 1962:229), as well as both Western and Eastern Yiddish, they remained diphthongs in Upper German, including High Alemannic. Because of this retention, High Alemannic has diphthongs in its inventory that are alien to Western Yiddish. Furthermore, the Middle High German front rounded vowels were unrounded in most High German dialects (see Schirmunski, 1962:205), as well as in Western and Eastern Yiddish, but are retained in High Alemannic. High Alemannic thus has front rounded vowels in its phoneme inventory that are also alien to Swiss Yiddish.

Whereas the Middle High German high long vowels *î*, *iu*, *û* (= /i:/, /y:/, /u:/) were diphthongized in most High German dialects (see Schirmunski 1962:214; in Standard German, they yield /ai/, /oi/, /au/), as well as both Western and Eastern Yiddish, they remain monophthongs in High Alemannic. While this retention of older forms does not directly influence the phonological system (High Alemannic does have diphthongs such as /ai/, /au/, /oi/ in its phoneme inventory, going back to historical sounds other than the Middle High German long high vowels), the distribution of the phonemes in cognate words becomes nevertheless fairly different if High Alemannic and Western Yiddish are compared. This holds, furthermore, for the phonological development regarded as criterial for Western Yiddish, the monophthongization of Middle High German *ei* and *ou* into Western Yiddish /ɛ:/. The Middle High German *ei* and *ou* remain diphthongs in most High Alemannic dialects, among others those co-territorial with Swiss Yiddish, but have been monophthongized in many High German (particularly Central German) dialects (see Schirmunski 1962:233–235). With respect to all these criteria, Western Yiddish is different from High Alemannic, but would be identical with most other High German dialects. The relatively high number of differences between Western Yiddish and its primary contact language in the Swiss setting (it would not be difficult to add further differences from other linguistic subsystems) has been said to be favorable for the conserva-

comes to refer to the special sociolinguistic setting (cf. 2.3). The German dialects co-territorial to Swiss Yiddish belong to the High Alemannic subgroup, therefore, throughout this paper (*High*) *Alemannic* and *Swiss German* are used practically as synonyms, the former evoking language-internal, the latter language-external factors.

tion of Swiss Yiddish by Weinreich and Weinreich (1950) and later by Guggenheim (1966:4):

- (4) It is possible that farther in the north of Germany, where the two languages are more similar, the transition between Yiddish and non-Yiddish is minimized; where the differences are more clear-cut, as in Switzerland, a gradual, an unnoticed transition is not possible. (Weinreich and Weinreich 1950:17-18)³

2.3 Bilingualism and Diglossia

The Surbtal informants interviewed in the 20th century are fully bilingual in Swiss German and Swiss Yiddish (in some instances, code switching can be observed); in fact, there are some indications that already quite early, Surbtal Jews spoke both Western Yiddish and German varieties, depending on their interlocutor. The following fragment is taken from a travel account of the late 18th century: "Among themselves they spoke their Judeo-German language, but indeed very intelligibly with us." (Maurer, 1794:184).⁴

There are cases in the Swiss materials in which there is an intermediate transition stage between Swiss German and Swiss Yiddish (such as utterances displaying a phonological system that has to be viewed to large extents as High Alemannic, while the syntax retains many Western Yiddish features). Such instances (not occurring in the materials published so far) are fairly rare though; I did not observe many cases of such inter-language mixing, and many speakers seem to have a fairly high degree of consciousness about the variety that they speak.

³Quotes from sources in languages other than English are translated throughout the paper, all translation (error)s being mine.

⁴The interpretation of this fragment is not entirely clear, however. Judging from the modern varieties, one would expect a fairly high degree of mutual intelligibility between Swiss German and Western Yiddish, unless a high percentage of hebraisms is used in the latter. There exist registers, however, which have precisely the function of keeping secret information from strangers by using hebraisms chosen at random. The best-documented case is the professional language of horse or other livestock dealers (see Guggenheim, 1954), but other Surbtal Jews to some extent could use the same technique (Guggenheim, 1954:51; Lowenstein, 1969:17 report a similar register for German informants). Therefore, I suspect that the utterances unintelligible to Maurer in the later 18th century might have belonged to such a register, rather than to the regular Western Yiddish dialect. Still, there is no doubt that the Surbtal Jews in the late 18th century already had more than one register at their disposal, one of which was very close or identical to the vernacular spoken by the non-Jews.

In that respect, it has to be remarked that the sociolinguistic setting in German-speaking Switzerland (see Rash, 1998 for a recent survey) is relatively unusual (at least in a European context); most notably, it differs considerably from neighboring Germany. It is almost circular to describe the sociolinguistic setting of German-speaking Switzerland as diglossia, since this very example was used (along with three others) by Ferguson (1959) to define this term. The major feature of diglossia is that dialect and standard language are in complementary distribution with respect to the situations in which they are used. In German-speaking Switzerland, Standard German is used in all formal situations, whereas Swiss German is used in all non-formal situations. There is (at least in the speakers' consciousness) a sharp boundary between dialect and standard, which contrasts to the dialect-standard continua to be observed in, among others, neighboring south-western Germany. There, the use of dialect is not linked to the situation, but rather to factors such as age or class of the speaker. Dialect is usually restricted to less urbanized, older, non-mobile people, whereas in German-speaking Switzerland, dialect is the vernacular of all classes (this is not to say that there are no differences between the idioms of different classes though; such differences do exist, but are variations on the dialectal level). This peculiarity of the sociolinguistic setting of the primary contact language may have been favorable to the preservation of Swiss Yiddish. Much in the same way as speakers of Swiss German have to make decisions as to which variety at their disposal to use in which situation, Swiss Jews chose different varieties in different situations (roughly, and this might hold only for the 20th century: Standard German in formal situations, Swiss German in non-formal situations in interaction with non-Jews, Swiss Yiddish as an in-group language, i.e. when talking with other Swiss Jews in non-formal situations). Such linguistic behavior might be favorable for keeping the varieties apart relatively neatly: under such circumstances, an "unnoticed transition" between German and Yiddish is even less likely.

2.4 Comparison with Western Yiddish in South-Western Germany

It is probably a combination of the internal and external factors discussed in 2.2 and 2.3 that led to the preservation of Swiss Yiddish. There are materials available on a Western Yiddish dialect spoken in south-western Germany, in a village immediately bordering Switzerland (see Guggenheim, 1961), which are less archaic than the Swiss materials. According to Guggenheim (1961:9), the difference is equal to almost a century. Since the primary contact language of this dialect is a High Alemannic dialect very similar to the co-territorial dialects of Swiss Yiddish, one is inclined to think that the lan-

guage-internal criteria might perhaps not be as important as the sociolinguistic setting (the historical setting in this German village in the 19th and beginning 20th century, I might add, is fairly similar to the Swiss situation). However, the situation observed could also be due to the fact that the data situation with respect to this German village is much worse than for the Swiss villages both in quantity and quality (compare more than a dozen Swiss informants, most of them born in the 1870s and 1880s, to the main informant of this south-western German village, born in 1896). It is possible that among the victims of the Holocaust of that particular village, Yiddish data that were equally (or nearly equally) as archaic as the Swiss materials could have been collected. If this were the case, the evaluation of the factors favorable to the preservation of Western Yiddish would have to be revised. However, since we lack any precise information, the question cannot be answered definitively.

3 Congruence and Non-Congruence with High Alemannic

3.1 Preliminary Considerations

Yiddish is different from most European languages in the fact that during its history, there never existed a territory where Yiddish was the only language. Yiddish has always been a minority language, co-territorial with various other languages, and it is therefore no surprise that language contact phenomena are a major issue in Yiddish linguistics. Uriel Weinreich (1952) outlined a framework called bilingual dialectology, exemplified by him using some parallel developments in Eastern Yiddish and Slavic. With respect to the grammatical phenomena observed in Yiddish generally, he states: "When we compare Yiddish and non-Yiddish dialectal developments in any part of the vast European area of overlap, we find cases of both congruence and equally interesting non-congruence in structure." (Weinreich, 1952:361). Both patterns can also be observed in Swiss Yiddish in comparison with High Alemannic, and deserve different explanations.

In the rest of the paper, I will outline some cases of both congruence and non-congruence in the grammar of Swiss Yiddish and its co-territorial German dialects. Features that are non-congruent with High Alemannic are candidates for being originally (Western) Yiddish, provided they are also absent in most other German varieties and possibly even have counterparts in other Yiddish varieties; such cases will be more closely examined in 3.4. For features that are congruent with Alemannic, a further subdivision is necessary. A match between Alemannic and Swiss Yiddish can of course be due to the fact that the structure observed as such is not very remarkable; thus, if a

structure occurring in Swiss Yiddish and High Alemannic also occurs in many other Yiddish and German varieties, we have a pattern that is not highly characteristic. If we are dealing with constructions, however, that are not very widespread in Yiddish and/or German varieties otherwise, language contact between Western Yiddish and Alemannic is a likely explanation. If such matches with Alemannic are observed in the Swiss Yiddish material, they very likely made their way into Swiss Yiddish via bilingual speakers and are thus interferences from High Alemannic. There are different phases of interference to be observed though, which can be linked to de Saussure's dichotomy between language (*langue*) and speech (*parole*):

- (5) In speech, interference is like sand carried by a stream; in language, it is the sedimented sand deposited on the bottom of the lake. The two phases of interference should be distinguished. In speech, it occurs anew in the utterances of the bilingual speaker as a result of his personal knowledge of the other tongue. In language, we find interference phenomena which, having frequently occurred in the speech of bilinguals, have become habitualized and established. (Weinreich, 1953:11)

While the conceptual difference between spontaneous and habitualized interferences is quite clear, it is not always that easy to determine whether a concrete case of interference in the material should be regarded as habitualized or spontaneous. One criterion which can be used, however, is variation and frequency: If for a certain construction, there exists variation between two structures, one matching Alemannic, while another construction different from Alemannic exists alongside it, the former being far rarer than the latter, it is quite probable that we are dealing with a spontaneous interference. If, however, only one construction (matching Alemannic) exists at all or is by far more frequent than an alternative construction, it is more likely that the interference has become established. In 3.2 and 3.3 I will discuss cases of both phases of interference in the documented form of Swiss Yiddish (due to lack of space, I will restrict myself to morphological and syntactic phenomena).

3.2 Spontaneous Interferences from High Alemannic

An instance of a spontaneous interference on the level of morphology is to be found in the system of the personal pronoun. For the accusative form of the first person plural, a clitic form is attested, such as the form *is* in (6):

(6) *tsum flus hot er is gabenft* (Guggenheim, 1966:27)

to _the end has he us blessed
 'to the end he blessed us'

The form *is* matches the Swiss German clitic form of this pronoun (it is typical for Alemannic according to Schirmunski (1962:454-455), although similar forms also occur in other German dialects), and its occurrence in the Swiss Yiddish utterance (6) is ascribed to influence from Swiss German by Guggenheim (1966:27, note 3). As a matter of fact, examples displaying the form *uns* are far more frequent, such as in (7):

(7) *hot mər uns k^hindər... gabenft* (Guggenheim, 1966:11)

has one us children... blessed
 'they blessed us kids'

Thus, it is very likely that the instance of *is* in (6) is a spontaneous interference, not a habitualized structural borrowing. If we compare Swiss German and Swiss Yiddish in that respect, the most important difference lies in the fact that in Swiss German, variation between a full and a clitic form of this pronoun exists (in many High Alemannic dialects, the forms would be *øis* as opposed to *is*), whereas in Swiss Yiddish, only one form *uns* occurs, to the exception of spontaneous interferences like the one just discussed. If the form *is* becomes established in the same distribution as in Swiss German, it will lead to a change in the system, since in the original Western Yiddish usage, there existed only one form.

A similar instance in the field of syntax can be observed for the so-called verbal doubling. There are examples in the Swiss Yiddish materials in which a doubling of the verb 'to go' can be observed if used in conjunction with an infinitive, as in (8):

(8) *das mər nid hot meẓə gēi go holə* (Guggenheim, 1966:30)

that one not has must go go get
 'that one had not to go and get'

This verbal doubling is well known from Alemannic (see Lötscher 1993), and the doubled element in (8) is ascribed to Swiss German influence by Guggenheim (1966: 30, note 12). As a matter of fact, an exact and fully grammatical counterpart of (8) in one High Alemannic dialect would

be *das mər n̄pd hət myəzə ga: go holə*. In Swiss Yiddish, we find other examples which do not display verbal doubling:

- (9) *di lait sin kaṇə Ø gratulirə* (Guggenheim, 1966:29; Ø added)
 the people are gone Ø congratulate
 'people went to congratulate'

In Swiss German, verbal doubling in conjunction with the verb 'to go' is obligatory (see Lötscher, 1993:182). As a matter of fact, a translation of (9) into High Alemannic yields an ungrammatical result: *d ly:t sind kaṇə*(go)gratuliərə*. Thus, instances such as (8) can be viewed as spontaneous interferences from Swiss German; they have not yet reached the same distribution and degree of grammaticalization in Swiss Yiddish as they have in Swiss German.

3.3 Structural Borrowings from High Alemannic

An instance of an established structural borrowing on the level of morphology can be found in the system of the verbal endings. In Swiss Yiddish, the usual ending of the second person singular is *-f*, as in *geif* 'you (sg.) go' (Guggenheim, 1966:23). This ending is different from the Standard Yiddish ending *-st* (see Jacobs et al., 1994:406-407), from Standard German *-st*, as well as from the ending in most German dialects, where the respective form is *-st* or *-ft* (see Schirmunski, 1962:520), but corresponds to the form of many Alemannic dialects, among others the ones co-territorial with Swiss Yiddish. Since there are only very few instances of other forms attested, it is a straightforward interpretation that we are dealing with a habitualized borrowing from Alemannic.

A parallel example on the level of syntax can be observed for the Swiss Yiddish relative clause. Relative clauses for all syntactic roles are formed with an invariant particle being homophonous with the adverb 'where', as in (10):

- (10) *di kfēṅkər, wu si bək^homə hen* (Guggenheim, 1966:29)
 the presents where they gotten have
 'the presents they got'

A relative particle homophonous to the adverb 'where' in all syntactic environments is also the only form of relative clause formation in the High

Alemannic dialects; thus, example (10), if translated word for word into High Alemannic, yields the perfectly grammatical *d qsfæŋk wo s ybærxo: hænd*. This type of relative clause is not very widespread among German dialects: according to Weise (1917:67), it is common only in Alemannic, Swabian, and parts of Rhine Franconian. Furthermore, in Eastern Yiddish, quite a different type of relative clause occurs (see Jacobs et al., 1994:416–417). Therefore, the type of relative clause observed in Swiss Yiddish is most likely a structural borrowing from High Alemannic.

3.4 Non-Congruences with High Alemannic

In Swiss Yiddish we also find structures that are not congruent with High Alemannic. Such instances are most interesting if they are also rare among other German varieties, but have counterparts in other Yiddish varieties.

As far as the morphology is concerned, one such instance can be found in the ending of the diminutive plural. In Swiss Yiddish, the diminutive plural ending is *-liç*, as in *ma:dliç* '(little) girls' (Guggenheim, 1966:10). This diminutive ending has an exact parallel in Eastern Yiddish, as in *meydlekh* '(little) girls' (see Jacobs et al., 1994:403), but is completely unknown in Alemannic and quite rare in German dialects; according to Schirmunski (1962:483–484), it only occurs in certain East Franconian and Rhine Franconian dialects (although in Middle High German times, it was also quite common in Bavarian).

A parallel syntactic example can be seen in the case used after prepositions. In Swiss Yiddish, at least for an older usage (virtually no informant observes this rule consistently), the only possible case after a preposition is the dative. This is especially astonishing in examples where for a German preposition, both dative and accusative are possible, but linked to a functional differentiation: dative encodes stable location, whereas accusative encodes movement. In (11), however, the preposition governs dative case (materializing in the form *də* of the definite article) for the encoding of movement:

- (11) *wen... ə juŋ uf də welt k^humən if* (Guggenheim 1966:30)
 when... a boy on the world come is
 'when a boy was born'

This generalized usage of the dative as the only prepositional case contrasts sharply with Standard German and most German dialects, among oth-

ers Alemannic; Shrier (1965:438) mentions this phenomenon only for an East Central German dialect. However, it corresponds to Eastern Yiddish, where one can only have *oyf der velt*, **oyf di velt* being ungrammatical.

4 Conclusion

Swiss Yiddish in its documented stage shows both spontaneous and habitualized structural borrowings from Alemannic. Yet, there are some structures which have a clear correlate in Eastern Yiddish. This shows that a Yiddish dialect in a German environment can be quite independent of German and have a life of its own. The question whether “the history of Western Yiddish dialects is independent of the history of German dialects” (LCAAJ 1:10) can be answered quite clearly for the Swiss materials. The most interesting aspects of Swiss Yiddish grammar from the point of view of Yiddish historical linguistics are of course structures as in 3.4, which allow us to increase our knowledge of Western Yiddish. If we succeed in finding such instances, many insights in Western Yiddish grammar might be gained and might ultimately shed some light on the relation of Western Yiddish to other Yiddish and German varieties.

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