

# ON THE LEXICON OF ESTONIAN YIDDISH

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## 1. GENERAL REMARKS

The dialect of Yiddish spoken by Estonian Jews (Estonian Yiddish) has hardly been a subject of research. It has only been mentioned by a few scholars (Bin-Nun 1973: 98; Lemchen 1995); however, Estonia is usually absent from the Yiddish language map (see e.g. Jofen 1988: 32, 33; Katz 1983: 1023; U. Weinreich 1962: 10, 12, 14, 16-20; Bin-Nun 1973 and U. Weinreich 1958: 230 are rare exceptions). Only two informants from Tartu (location no. 58265) have been interviewed for LCAAJ (Herzog 1998: personal communication); as will become clear later, the data from Estonia deserve a broader representation on dialectological maps of Yiddish.

Except for a few articles on Yiddish-Estonian language contact (Ariste 1981; Verschik 1997) and on general patterns of Jewish multilingualism in Estonia (Verschik 1995; 1999) there are no papers dedicated exclusively to the dialect. Yet the dialect is on the verge of extinction (500-600 speakers); one can fully agree with P. Ariste (1970: 250) on the matter:

[In Estland] gibt es heutzutage unter den Germanisten keinen Forscher, der sich ernst für das Jiddische interessierte, so daß die lokale jiddische Mundart vielleicht verschwinden wird, ohne daß man sie für die Wissenschaft fixiert hätte.

The aim of the present article is to outline the main components of the lexicon of Estonian Yiddish in the context of other North-eastern Yiddish dialects (Courland and Lithuanian Yiddish especially), as well as the impact of co-territorial languages (Estonian, Baltic German and Standard German); a systematic description of the phonology and morphology of Estonian Yiddish goes beyond the range of the present research.

The data have been obtained from interviews with 28 informants (conducted in 1995-98) and from the author's personal observations of the Yiddish-speaking community. Yiddish newspapers printed in Estonia in the period 1918-40 and the Yiddish folklore collection in the Museum of Literature (Tartu, Estonia) served as a source as well.

## 2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ESTONIAN JEWS

### 2.1. Jewish settlement in Estonia

Unlike elsewhere in the Baltics, Jews played no part in early Estonian history. Although some Jews are known to have settled in Tallinn in the 14th century, one can only speak of a Jewish presence as late as the beginning of the 19th century.

During Russian rule (1710-1918) Estonia did not belong to the Pale of Settlement, which fact has substantially affected the socio-cultural history of the Jews in Estonia. Jews migrated mainly from Courland and from parts of Lithuania (Ariste 1970: 250) bringing their dialect with them (on dialect formation see section 3). Unlike Jews in the Pale, Estonian Jews were highly urbanized, living mainly in the two largest cities of Tallinn and Tartu and constituting a distinct minority. Orthodoxy and strict observance, as well as traditional Talmudic scholarship and rabbinical authority never played a significant role in the community. Being a minority meant automatic multilingualism: everybody knew Yiddish, but a knowledge of German – the language of education, culture and the local nobility – (or, in some cases, Russian) as well as Estonian – the language of the co-territorial majority – was necessary. The community is characterized as tiny, atypical, urbanized, modernized and acculturated (Lane 1995; Mendelsohn 1983: 253-254).

### 2.2. Life in independent Estonia and cultural autonomy

In 1918 Estonia became an independent state for the first time in its history. Since 1925 the right of cultural autonomy for national minorities was enacted by law; of all the minorities living in Estonia at that period only the Jews and Baltic Germans claimed this right (for a detailed analysis of the law see Aun 1949; documents on activities of various minorities see Matsulevitš 1993).

Jewish cultural autonomy came into being in 1926 and existed till the Soviet occupation in 1940. During that period there occurred a kind of national awakening; the list of clubs, organizations, societies and activities is surprisingly long for such a small community (4300 persons according to the census of 1934). The Estonian Jews did not escape the struggle between Yiddishism and Hebraism (this topic is relevant both for Yiddish studies and for the general language policy context in Estonia; unfortunately, it has not been investigated at all).

The community has always been multilingual and remains so. The usual language combinations are Yiddish-Estonian-Russian-German, Yiddish-Estonian, Yiddish-Estonian-German or Yiddish-Estonian-Russian. Code-switching between these languages is the norm.

As is stated in Mendelsohn (1983: 254), the situation of the Jews in Estonia more closely approximated that so devotedly hoped for by Dubnow and other ideologues of extraterritorial autonomy than it did elsewhere in the diaspora.

### **2.3. Developments after 1940: the 1st Soviet occupation, the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust, the 2nd Soviet occupation**

After the occupation and annexation of Estonia by the Soviet Union Jewish cultural autonomy was abolished, all Jewish institutions were closed, and many Jewish activists were arrested. The group of approx. 10,000 people deported from Estonia to the Soviet Union by the Soviet authorities also included 500 Estonian Jews, i.e. over 10 per cent of the total Jewish population. After the outbreak of war between Nazi Germany and the USSR, some 3000 Jews fled to Russia (the majority of them returned after the end of the war), while 1000 stayed in Estonia and were murdered by the Nazis in 1941.

For those who returned after 1944 continued life without cultural and linguistic identity under Soviet rule seemed meaningless, which led to the emigration of many Yiddish speakers, especially younger people.

After 1944 a substantial group of assimilated, Russian-speaking Jews from the USSR came to settle. They belong mainly to the Russian-speaking community and their culture is Russian; their identity differs a great deal from that of the indigenous Estonian Jews (on the conflict of the two Jewish identities see Lane 1995; Verschik 1999). These Jews today constitute a majority (appr. 2000), while Estonian Jews (1000) are a declining minority. Although Jewish life in Estonia has undergone a sort of revival since 1988, the number of Yiddish speakers is decreasing (500-600).

## **3. KEY POINTS IN DIALECT FORMATION**

### **3.1. The importance of Courland Yiddish**

As is stated by Ariste (1970: 250), Jews migrated to Estonia from Courland and from parts of Lithuania, bringing their dialect with them. Afterwards it became subject to various changes and open to the influence of Estonian. Bin-Nun (1973: 98) claims that Estonian Yiddish is a relatively young dialect and such a statement is fully justified, since Jewish settlement in Estonia began to develop from the beginning of the 19th century. Thus, Estonian Yiddish is one of the North-eastern Yiddish dialects and should be studied in this context (with especial attention to Courland Yiddish).

However, Courland Yiddish and its status among North-eastern Yiddish dialects became a subject for discussion after the publication of M. Weinreich's now classical paper (1923). In his article M. Weinreich outlines the main features of the dialect, emphasizing its isolation from other Yiddish dialects and paying special attention to the impact of German and the peculiarities of the socio-cultural situation.

Z. Kalmanovitsh (1926) argues against the claim of isolation and insists that Courland Yiddish shares many features with Zameter Yiddish (Zamet, or Žemaitija, is a part of Lithuania) and should be considered as part of Zameter Yiddish, with which argument J. Mark (1951) is in agreement.

The discussion is continued in Ch. Lemchen (1995: 19), where the author takes an intermediate position. After 1829 Jewish migration to Courland was restricted and, according to Lemchen, one may speak of relative isolation. It is clear that in the past Courland and Zameter Yiddish had constituted a linguistic entity, which split after 1829. Due to numerous common features in both dialects Kalmanovitsh ignored the autonomy of Courland Yiddish. His argument against the autonomy of Courland Yiddish (the presence of some Slavisms) is not sufficient proof of contacts with other dialects. Since Kalmanovitsh does not mention any particular Slavisms, it is hard to draw any conclusions.

### 3.2. Estonian Yiddish as a North-eastern dialect

It is clear that Estonian Yiddish should be studied in the total context of NEY dialects. Its derivation from Courland Yiddish has already been mentioned above, but Zameter Yiddish connections cannot be ignored. Among all the Yiddish dialects of Lithuania the dialect of Zamet is the closest; the analysis of Lithuanian Yiddish dialects by J. Mark (1951) brings us to the conclusion that Estonian (and Courland) Yiddish share with it most of its morphological and phonological features (the preservation of long-short vowel opposition, the merging of the Accusative and Dative, the use of certain prepositions, the loss of neuter gender etc.).

A number of loans from Lithuanian had entered co-territorial Yiddish dialects before the split of Zameter and Courland Yiddish; later on some of these loans were preserved in Courland Yiddish (for example *špongalex* 'cranberries', Lemchen 1995: 21) and brought to Estonia. According to Ariste (1970), several dozen Lithuanianisms could still be heard in the speech of Estonian Jews. However, only a couple of Lithuanianisms can be registered today (see section 4.3).

The development of Estonian Yiddish took place in a socio-cultural setting similar to that of Courland, in relative isolation from other Yiddish dialects. The later aspect has led to the preservation of some Courlandisms in the lexicon as well as of certain features of phonology and morphology up to the present day (see section 3.3). Contacts with Estonian and Yiddish-Estonian bilingualism have induced changes exclusively characteristic of the dialect.

### 3.3. The Main features of Estonian Yiddish

A full description of the dialect is not the subject of the present article; however, some distinctive features of phonology and morphology must be mentioned.

The opposition of short and long vowels has survived up to now: (*ix*) *bin* 'I am' – *bi:n* 'bee' (vowels 31 and 32), *bet* 'bed' – (*ix*) *be:t* 'I beg' (vowels 21 and 25), *oder* 'or' – *o:der* 'vein' (vowels 41 and 12/13), (*di*) *zun* 'sun' – (*der*) *zu:n* 'son' (vowels 51 and 52). It has not been resolved whether there was an opposition of short *a* and long *a*: in Courland Yiddish – U. Weinreich (1991: 19) quotes Kalmanovitsh and M. Weinreich, who disagree about the length of *a* in *grapn*. In Estonian Yiddish *a*: occurs in loanwords: *ja*: 'yes' < German *ja*, Estonian *jaa*, *ka:like* 'turnip' < Estonian *kaalikas*. Typical Courland diphthongs *öu* (vowel 42/44) and *äi* (vowel 22/24) can still be heard, though the former has almost disappeared and is no longer present in the speech of informants born after 1920; the latter exists along with *ei*: *köufn* and *keifn* 'to buy', *möude ani* 'I thank' (the first line of a prayer), *ix gei ahäim* 'I am going home'. Vowel 54 has two realizations: *ou* and *au*, both being in use: *maul* and *moul* 'mouth', *haus* and *hous* 'house'. Thus, it is not entirely correct to consider Estonia as an *au*-area (the map in U. Weinreich 1958: 230, referring to Mark 1951). In Tallinn one can hear a diphthong intermediate between *au* and *ou*; the same is reported by Lehiste (1965: 57) concerning the variety of Baltic German spoken in Tallinn.

A unique feature of Estonian Yiddish is the presence of the front vowels *ö* and *ü* (and long *ü*). The former has been registered in only two words: *tsvölf* 'twelve' and *rötlax* 'rose rash'; the latter appears in words like *fünf* 'five', *antsündn* 'to light', *tü:r* 'door', as well as in so-called internationalisms: *süstern* 'system', *kostü:m* 'costume' (on the realization of internationalisms see section 4.4.3). It is not clear whether the presence of *ö* and *ü* (in words of Germanic origin) is an internal development or due to the influence of German (with some influence of an Estonian adstratum where both vowels exist; no speaker of Yiddish in Estonia has any difficulty in producing these vowels in Estonian, while Estonian *õ* is often mispronounced by older speakers and substituted by *ö*). The question of the rounding and unrounding of front vowels in Baltic German, Low German, Estonian dialects and Standard Estonian is far from being solved (Lehiste 1965: 59; Ariste 1981: 102-103); the correlation of these vowels to the process which the Estonian Yiddish vocalic system has undergone needs further investigation.

The distribution of hissing and hushing consonants is identical to that of Courland Yiddish (M. Weinreich 1923: 238; U. Weinreich 1952: 376-377): *š* in words of Slavic and Semitic origin, e.g., *kaše* 'porridge', *mištome* 'perhaps', *šimxe* 'holiday, celebration', *beišeilem* 'cemetery'; in words of Germanic origin the

distribution of *s* and *š* follows the German pattern: *visn* 'to know', *nas* 'wet', *štein* 'stone', *šuld* 'guilt'.

The acquisition of phonological quantity (duration) under the influence of Estonian is characteristic of Yiddish speakers from Tartu. Estonian has three quantities (short, long and superlong). One-syllable words in Estonian usually have the third quantity; this rule is sometimes applied to one-syllable Yiddish words such as *vald* 'forest', *gold* 'gold', *lomp* 'lamp'. It is interesting that the same phenomenon – the acquisition of duration – was registered by A. Weiss (1959: 52-53) in Baltic German.

### 3.4. Contacts with other languages and dialects

#### 3.4.1. Standard Yiddish and other Yiddish dialects

It needs to be investigated further whether Standard Yiddish has exercised any influence on Estonian Yiddish. Some speakers were exposed to Standard Yiddish through the press etc. as well as at school in the inter-war period. However, after cultural autonomy had been abolished and Yiddish excluded from several domains (the press, education, theatre etc.), contacts with the rest of the Yiddish-speaking (Yiddish-writing) world were disrupted. Many found it disturbing to read books and magazines in Soviet Yiddish spelling; it became difficult to buy a book in Yiddish etc. For these reasons proficiency in reading and writing Yiddish has drastically decreased.

Yiddish-speakers are very well aware of their dialect; they consider it beautiful and different from other dialects. It is usually emphasized that 'we do not speak like Lithuanian Jews; Lithuanian Jews use many Russian words'. In other words, the speakers realize that the Slavic component ('Russian words') in Estonian Yiddish is quite small. None of the informants has a command of any Yiddish dialect other than their native one.

#### 3.4.2. Standard German, Baltic German

As was mentioned above, the German *Kultursprache* lost importance in the Baltic region after World War II; nevertheless, at least some Estonian Jews continue to read German books and to communicate in German. Nowadays one can subscribe to a German-language newspaper and watch German TV programmes. It is a paradox that after the *Umsiedlung* of Baltic Germans in 1939 and World War II the only (native) speakers of German in Estonia are Jews. The impact of German on the lexicon will be discussed in section 4.2.

### 3.4.3. Standard Estonian and Estonian dialects

The Estonian language gained prestige after independence in 1918. It is hard to make any judgement as to the degree to which the generation born, say, in the second half of the 19th century was proficient in Estonian. All the informants, including the oldest (born in 1903) claimed that their parents spoke Estonian, but the extent of their fluency and ability to write and read still remains unclear.

However, the informants speak, read and write Estonian; for most of them Estonian is their first language. Yiddish newspapers published in Estonia between 1918 and 1940 contain quite a number of untranslated Estonian words or expressions, often not even transliterated (e.g. *Undzer Vort* 9, 1932). This fact suggests that at that period a good command of Estonian was not unusual.

Estonian dialects have not affected Estonian Yiddish and thus are excluded from the present discussion.

### 3.4.4. Russian

It is important to distinguish between the Slavic element in the Yiddish lexicon and Russian loans of a later period. Some Slavisms are present in Estonian Yiddish: *kitke* 'challa', *bobe* 'grandmother', *zeide* 'grandfather', though words of Germanic origin prevail.

However, Russian was the official language of the Russian Empire as well as, later, of the Soviet Union; thus certain words and concepts connected with the administrative sphere were sporadically borrowed (Verschik 1997).

For many Yiddish speakers born in independent Estonia Russian was a foreign language, which they first learned during the period of evacuation. After World War II one had to choose between an Estonian or a Russian future, since education in Yiddish became impossible.

The informants frequently code-switch between Estonian, Russian and Yiddish, but the number of established borrowings from Russian needs to be investigated.

## 4. COMPONENTS OF THE LEXICON

### 4.1. Courlandisms

By 'Courlandisms' we mean lexical items (of various origin) registered in Courland Yiddish by U. Weinreich (1923) and Z. Kalmanovitch (1926) which are also present in Estonian Yiddish. Since many Courlandisms are the result of Germanic influence on the lexicon, comments on most of the Courlandisms are to be found in

section 4.2 in a discussion of Germanisms. The Estonian etymon (usually a Germanic loan) is mentioned for purposes of illustration, if relevant.

The list of Courlandisms in Estonian Yiddish is as follows:

*bru:klenes* 'lingonberries' (*Rhodococcum vitis-idaea*) < Latvian *brūklene* (Kalmanovitsh 1926: 172), cf. Lithuanian Yiddish *bruknes* (Lemchen 1995: 70; see also section 4.3), other Yiddish varieties *brusnitses*, *bruslines*, *moxjagde*, *borovke*, *pianitses* (Stuchkoff 1950: 226).

*bu:d* 'store' (M. Weinreich 1923: 212); according to Kalmanovitsh (1926: 166) the word was spread far beyond the borders of Courland; one could hear it in the Kaunas district and in Poland. Estonian Yiddish has no other words for 'store' (cf. Estonian *pood* 'store' < MLG *bōde*, Mägiste 1982-83: 2131).

*gurk* 'cucumber' (*Cucumis*) (M. Weinreich 1923: 215); cf. Stuchkoff (1950: 226) *ugerke*, *ugerik*, *gurk*, *ugerok*.

*i:blen zix* 'to be nauseated' (Kalmanovitsh 1926: 170) < MHG *übel* (?), cf. other Yiddish varieties *eklen*.

*kadik* 'juniper' (*Juniperus*) according to Kalmanovitsh (1926: 183), a loan from Latvian; however, see also Lemchen (1995: 102) and sections 4.3 and 4.5.

*kaneil* 'cinnamon' (Kalmanovitsh 1926: 183), cf. other Yiddish varieties *tsimering*, *tsimerik*, *tsimt* (of MHG origin).

*mits* 'hat' (M. Weinreich 1923: 225), in Estonian Yiddish *müts*; Stuchkoff (1950: 522) also indicates *mits*, *mitsl*, *mitske*.

*proln zix* 'to boast' (Kalmanovitsh 1926: 181), cf. other Yiddish varieties *barimen zix*; cf. Estonian *praalima* < MLG *pralen* (Mägiste 1982-83: 2157).

*raut* 'windowpane' (M. Weinreich 1923: 235), cf. Yiddish *šoib*, see also Jacobs (1994) and section 4.5.

*redl* 'ladder' according to M. Weinreich (1923: 236) may be a loan from Estonian; however, see section 4.2.1.

*ši:ber* 'chimney flap' (Kalmanovitsh 1926: 186), cf. *juške*, cf. Estonian *siiber* < German *Schieber* (Mägiste 1982-83: 2780).

*šmant* 'cream' (M. Weinreich 1923: 239), cf. Yiddish *smetene*.

*špongelax* 'cranberry' (Kalmanovits 1926: 186), cf. other Yiddish varieties *šuravines*, *šurexlines*, *kljukve*, *žerexlines*, *špongeles* (Stuchkoff 1950: 226); in Estonian Yiddish it is remembered only by older informants; currently the Estonian loan *jōhvike/jōhvike* < Estonian *jōhvikas* 'cranberry' is used; see also Lemchen (1995: 21) and section 4.3.

*trexter* 'funnel' (Kalmanovitsh 1926: 177), cf. *leike*, *kreindl* (U. Weinreich 1977: 226).

*u:r* 'watch, clock' (M. Weinreich 1923: 215), cf. *zeiger*.

## 4.2. Germanisms

Long-established German linguistic and cultural influence, on the one hand, and lack of a substantial co-territorial Slavic population, on the other, are the reasons why the Slavic constituent of Estonian Yiddish is so small. Etymons of Germanic origin often correspond to Slavic loans in other Eastern Yiddish dialects. The same claim can be made for Courland Yiddish (Jofen 1988: 35) for the same historical reasons.



Thus, where Standard Yiddish and other Yiddish dialects have:

*lještš* 'bream', *podloge* 'floor', (*u*)*krop/krip/krop* 'dill', *kaiške* 'duck', *bulbe* 'potato', *juške* 'chimney flap',

Estonian Yiddish has:

*breks* 'bream', *di:l* 'floor', *dil* 'dill', *ente* 'duck', *kartofl* 'potato', *ši:ber* 'chimney flap'.

#### 4.2.1. Low German and Baltic German element

It is not entirely clear how Low German loans entered Courland Yiddish: whether Low Germanisms entered Courland Yiddish as remnants in High German, or from Low German directly (Jacobs 1994).

Whatever the history of Low Germanisms in Courland Yiddish may be, in Estonian Yiddish one can distinguish two groups of Low Germanisms: the first, older one, was probably brought along from Courland, whereas some Low Germanisms of that group may have entered Estonian Yiddish via contacts with Baltic German already in Estonia (according to Ariste 1981: 28, Low German was spoken in Tallinn as late as the beginning of the 19th century); the second group entered Estonian Yiddish later via Estonian, where these Low Germanisms are long-established loans (see section 4.4).

Examples of Low Germanisms and Baltic Germanisms of the first group:

*arst* 'doctor' (? < Estonian *arst*) < Low German *Artzte*, cf. Yiddish *dokter*.

*klade* 'a big notepad', 'writing book' (? < Estonian *klade*) < German *Kladde* (Mägiste 1982-83: 861) < MLG *kladde* (Kobolt 1990: 147), cf. Yiddish *heft*, *kalet*, *bruiljon* (Stuchkoff 1950: 337).

*kaneil* 'cinnamon' (Kalmanovitsh 1926: 183), also *kane:l* (cf. Estonian *kaneel*) < MLG *kan(n)él*.

*leiz* 'free, mere, open' (Standard Yiddish *loiz* 'free, liquid'), *di tü:r iz leiz* 'the door is open', cf. Baltic German *die Tür ist los*, cf. Standard German *offen* (Nottbeck 1988: 55), cf. Estonian *lausa*, *laus-* (?) Germanic, Gothic *laus* 'open' (Raun 1982: 71).

*proln zix* 'to boast' (Kalmanovitsh 1926: 181), cf. Yiddish *barimen zix*, cf. Estonian *praalima* < MLG *pralen* (Mägiste 1982-83: 2157).

*redl* 'ladder' (M. Weinreich 1923: 236), cf. Yiddish *leiter*; Weinreich concludes that it might be a loan from Estonian (< *redel*); however, it is more probable that *redl* < Baltic German *Reddel*; Estonian *redel* < Baltic German *Reddel* (Mägiste 1982-83: 2437).

*sült/zült* 'jelly' < MLG *sült*, cf. Estonian *sült* < MLG *sülte*; cf. other Yiddish varieties *putša*, *petše*, *petsa*, *galjerte*, *xolodets*, *iškes*, *študing*, *gegliverexts* etc. (Stuchkoff 1950: 225).

*trexter* 'funnel' (Kalmanovitsh 1926: 177) < LG *trechter*, cf. *leike*, *kreindl* (U. Weinreich 1977: 131); cf. Estonian (dial.) *teker*, Latvian *tekteris* < LG *trechter* (Vaba 1996: 111); Estonian *trehter* < MLG (Raag 1987: 324).

#### 4.2.2. High German and Standard German influence

A great number of Germanisms mentioned by M. Weinreich (1923) and Kalmanovitsh (1926) in their survey of Courland Yiddish, have also been registered in Estonian Yiddish. Since a knowledge of German was a *conditio sine qua non* for more or less educated people in the Baltics, and the Estonian Jews, as a relatively modern and upwardly mobile group, often had a pro-German cultural orientation, the great influence of Standard German on the lexicon of Estonian Yiddish is not surprising.

Yiddish forms such as *ljarem* 'noise', *šturem* 'storm', *turem* 'tower', *širem* 'umbrella' are not used; instead one can hear Standard German (or near Standard German) forms such as *larm*, *šturm*, *turm*, *širm*.

Another example of Standard German influence is the substitution of apocopated Yiddish nouns by non-apocopated Standard German ones. Apocope, or the loss of a word-final vowel, already occurred in the pre-Yiddish period, while non-apocopated German component nouns are probably recent loans from NHG (Jacobs 1990: 48-49). Thus, instead of Yiddish *šul* 'school', 'synagogue', *lip* 'lip', *blum* 'flower', *end* 'end' there is *šu:le*, *lipe*, *blume*, *ende* respectively. The same can be claimed concerning the preposition *on* 'without', cf. Estonian Yiddish *o:ne*, cf. German *ohne*.

The standard German prefix *er-* is substituted for the corresponding Yiddish *der-*, thus: *ertseiln* 'to tell', cf. Yiddish *dertseiln*; *ertsi:en* 'to bring up', cf. *dertsien*; *erloubeniš/erlaubeniš* 'permit' (noun) etc.

The Yiddish indefinite pronouns *emets* 'somebody', *ergets* 'somewhere', *epes* 'something' are used less frequently than German-influenced *jemand*, *irgendvu*, *etvos*.

Some Germanisms in Estonian Yiddish were also used in Courland Yiddish (see 4.1). A list of some High and Standard Germanisms is as follows:

*befor* 'before' < German *bevor*, cf. Yiddish *eider*, *for*.

*boksbe:rn* 'blackcurrant' < German *Bocksbeere*, cf. Yiddish *vaimper*, *smorodine*, cf. Estonian (dial.) *sokumarjad* (loan-translation) < German *Bocksbeere* (Vilbaste 1993: 533).

*breks* 'bream' < German *Brachsen*, cf. Yiddish *lještš* (Stuchkoff 1950: 247).

*dil* 'dill' < German *Dill*, cf. Yiddish (*u*)*krop*, *krip* (Stuchkoff 1950: 250), cf. Estonian *till* < German *Dill* (Mägiste 1982-83: 3171).

*i:blen zix* 'to be nauseated' (Kalmanovitsh 1926: 170) < MHG *übel* (?), cf. other Yiddish varieties *eklen*, cf. Estonian *iiveldama* < MHG *übel* (?).

*kafe* 'coffee' < German *Kaffee*, cf. Yiddish *kave*.

*klatsšn* 'to gossip' < German *klatschen*, cf. Yiddish *rexiles traibn*, *motten*, *baredn*, *jenteven*, *ploišn* etc. (Stuchkoff 1950: 585), cf. Estonian *klatsšima* < German *klatschen* (Mägiste 1982-83: 864).

*onkel* 'uncle' < German *Onkel*, cf. Yiddish *feter*; Stuchkoff (1950: 174) finds *onkel* inappropriate in standard language but nevertheless mentions the item in his list. *feter* is unknown in Estonian Yiddish.

*ouuserdem/lauserdem* 'besides' < German *außerdem*, cf. Yiddish *a xuts* (< Hebrew).

*ši:ber* 'chimney flap' (Kalmanovitsh 1926: 186), cf. *juške* (U. Weinreich 1977: 587/206), cf. Estonian *siiber* < German *Schieber* (Mägiste 1982-83: 2780).

*saueršmant/soueršmant* 'sour cream' (M. Weinreich 1923: 239) < German *Schmant*, cf. Yiddish *smetene*. According to Joffen (1988: 35), *šmant* came into Yiddish through German but is of Slavic origin; however, Vasmer (1971, IV: 686-687) warns that MHG *Schmant* and MLG *Schmant* are not to be linked with Russian and Ukrainian *smetana*, Polish *śmetana*.

*tante* 'aunt' < German *Tante*, cf. Yiddish *mume*. U. Weinreich (1977: 191/602) lists it, but finds it inappropriate in the standard language.

*überhaupt/überhaupt* 'generally' < German *überhaupt*, cf. Yiddish *bixlal* (< Semitic).

*um* 'in order to' < German *um*, cf. Yiddish *kedei* (< Semitic).

*u:r* 'watch, clock' (M. Weinreich 1923: 215) < German *Uhr*, cf. *zeiger*.

### 4.3. Lithuanianisms

Ch. Lemchen's research (1995) on Lithuanian-Yiddish contact is – to my best knowledge – the only one of its kind. Yet contacts between Yiddish and co-territorial languages in the Baltic region deserve more scholarly attention (see section 4.5). Lemchen gives a short survey of the history of Jewish settlement in Lithuania and in Courland and compiles a substantial list of Lithuanianisms (loans from Lithuanian and its dialects) in Lithuanian Yiddish.

It is important that numerous Lithuanianisms, as Lemchen has demonstrated, were spread beyond the borders of Lithuania proper, but also in Courland and in Estonia. In the later Yiddish version of his paper Lemchen refers to P. Ariste's review (1970) of the earlier Lithuanian-language version, and indicates whether a loan from Lithuanian was also known in Estonia.

However, almost all Lithuanianisms recorded by Ariste as having been used in Estonian Yiddish and quoted by Lemchen, have disappeared and cannot be heard today. This fact demonstrates again how important a study of a small community may be.

Lexical items still used or remembered by informants are marked with an asterisk (\*) in the following list.

*babale* 'creeping insect', probably also in Latvia (Lemchen 1995: 65).

*bande* 'cattle' (Lemchen 1995: 66).

*baravik* 'boletus' < *baravykas* (Lemchen 1995: 67).

*birbenen* (*opbirbenen*) 'to weep (a long time)' < *birbti* (Lemchen 1995: 62, 69).

*blerenen* (*opblerenen*) 'to weep loudly' < *blerbti* (Lemchen 1995: 62, 69).

*bruknes* (\*) 'lingonberry' < *bruknès*, Courland Yiddish *bru:klenes* (Lemchen 1995: 70); see also section 4.1.

*ganikle* 'pasture' < *ganykla* (Lemchen 1995: 71).

*kadagines*, *kadeges* (*Juniperus*) 'juniper' (Lemchen 1995: 102), Courland Yiddish *kadik* (Kalmanovitsh 1926: 183). According to Lemchen, the source might be LG *kaddik*; however, see section 4.5.

*kaleid* 'Christmas' (Lemchen 1995: 103); in Estonian Yiddish *vainaxt* < German *Weinacht*.

*lupite* (\*) 'rag', 'a person with a weak will' < Lithuanian *lupeta* or Latvian *lupata* (Lemchen 1995: 84), also mentioned by M. Weinreich (1923: 223); in Estonian Yiddish used in the meaning 'rag'.

*nuke* 'a chunk of bread' (M. Weinreich 1923: 226), according to Lemchen (1995: 88), 'an opgebroxene štik broit' < Latvian *nuka*, Lithuanian *niukas* (from Slavic), apparently from Latvian. However, Lemchen does not mention any particular Slavic source; cf. Estonian *nukk* (Genitive *nuki*) meaning 1) 'a chunk of bread', 2) 'knuckle', and Estonian *nukk* (Genitive *nuka*) 'corner'. Both Estonian words, *nukk*: *nuki* and *nukk*: *nuka* have close meanings, but are apparently of different origin: the *i*-stem suggests Low German origin and the *a*-stem Swedish. Mägiste (1982-83: 1738-1739) concludes that the stem might be of Balto-Finnic or of Swedish origin; SKES (1958: 397) lists *nukk*: *nuki* < LG *nok*, *nokke* and *nukk*: *nuka* < Swedish *nock*, *nocke*; the same is suggested in SSA (1995: 236). The etymology suggested in SKES and SSA is more likely; LG seems to be the source for Estonian (and probably Latvian). LG or Swedish was probably the source for Balto-Finnic and Latvian; thus, it is possible that Courland Yiddish *nuke* (? < Latvian) < LG *nok*, *noke*.

*pipke* 'pipe' < *pypkè* (Lemchen 1995: 99).

*rupenen* 'to worry', *rupenen zix* (Ariste 1970: 251) < Lithuanian *rūpėti* or Latvian *rūpēt*, may also be from Slavic (Lemchen 1995: 113).

*snuke* (\*) 'snout', dem. *snutske(le)* 'a little face', also in Courland (Kalmanovitsh 1926) < Lithuanian *snukis*, Latvian *snuķis* (Lemchen 1995: 90); in Estonian Yiddish *šnuke*, *šnutskale*.

*šl(j)ure* 'old shoe' (M. Weinreich 1923: 238) < Lithuanian *šliurė*, Latvian *šlura* (Lemchen 1995: 118), according to P. Ariste (1970) originates from Baltic German.

*tupenen* 'to sit' (about birds), 'to sit at home all the time' < *tupėti* (Lemchen 1995: 79, M. Weinreich 1923: 219).

*tripenen* 'to walk noisily, making loud steps' < *trypti* (Lemchen 1995: 80).

#### 4.4. The impact of Estonian

The influence of Estonian upon Yiddish is a relatively recent phenomenon; nevertheless, the importance and prestige of Estonian for Yiddish speakers increased rapidly after Estonia gained her independence in 1918. All the informants (dates of birth ranging between 1903-63) have a native or, at least, relatively high proficiency in Estonian. The structural influence of Estonian upon Estonian Yiddish is not to be discussed in the present article; further analysis concerns the lexicon only.

Estonian influence on the lexicon is of two types: an indirect one, when Estonian loanwords have entered Yiddish via Baltic German in the Baltic languages,

and a direct one, when items are borrowed directly from Estonian. Cases of mild interference from Estonian will be analyzed separately.

#### 4.4.1. Indirect influence

The case of *lage* 'ceiling' clearly illustrates the importance of Estonian sources, as will be argued below. Although plenty of words for 'ceiling' do exist in various Yiddish dialects (Stuchkoff 1950: 113 lists *stelje*, *sufit*, *pulap*, *polap*, *polep*, etc.), *lage* is the only word for the concept used in Estonian Yiddish. The area of *lage* (in some localities *eiberlage*), however, is greater than the territory of Estonian Yiddish: it includes Courland and some localities of Lithuania. In our opinion, the etymon originates from Estonian *lagi* 'ceiling'; it might have been borrowed into Yiddish via Baltic German. The origin of Baltic German *Lage* < Estonian *lagi* is demonstrated by Kiparsky (1936: 50).

Estonian Yiddish *luxt* 'waterside meadow' is probably borrowed via Baltic German *Lucht*, which had previously been borrowed from Estonian *luht*. According to Nottbeck (1988: 53), Baltic German *Lucht* < Estonian *luht*; Ariste (1981: 32) claims that the borrowing from Estonian into Low German already existed in the Middle Ages as a result of extensive Estonian-Low German bilingualism in Tallinn.

#### 4.4.2. Direct influence

As the contacts between Yiddish and Estonian are recent and not so extensive (Ariste 1981: 158), the number of Yiddish loans in Standard Estonian is quite small. The same is true in the case of borrowings from Estonian into Yiddish.

Differentiation between borrowing and one-word code-switching poses problems in some cases (Andersson 1993: 249-250; Filppula 1991: 6-8; Lauttamus 1991; Poplack 1988: 219-221; Romaine 1989: 137-147; Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 50). As is argued by Andersson (1993), the differentiation is often possible on the theoretical level only, since in practice there is no agreement on reliable criteria for such a differentiation.

It is hard to distinguish between integrated and non-integrated borrowing because the process of integration is very gradual. The mechanisms of integration of Estonian loanwords into Yiddish are not entirely clear (Verschik 1997: 752-753). A continuum model (a gradual shift from code-switching via nonce-borrowing to integrated loans) was proposed by Lauttamus (quoted in Filppula 1991: 8). Nonce-borrowing and code-switching constantly occur due to Yiddish-Estonian bilingualism and high proficiency in both languages, and it is often hard to judge whether an item is an established loan or not.

### Examples of borrowing:

*jõhvike/jõhvike* (fem.) 'cranberry' < Estonian *jõhvikas*, stem *jõhvika-*; according to long-established integrational pattern, the final *-a* > *-e* (*bulbe* 'potato', *simxe* 'joy', 'celebration'). *a*-stem Estonian words seem to fit the pattern.

*faieršodn* (masc.) 'fire' (loan-translation) < Estonian *tulekahju* (*tuli*, Gen. *tule* 'fire' + *kahju* 'damage'), cf. Yiddish *brand*, *faier*, *sreife*. The etymon was registered in Tartu at the end of the 1920s (ERA Juudi 2: 25) and was also heard there by the author in 1997.

*ka:like*, pl. *ka:likes* 'turnip' < Estonian *kaalikas*, stem *kaalika-*.

*kohvik* (masc., plural not heard) 'coffee shop' < Estonian *kohvik*. The word is also known to have been borrowed into the speech of the local Russians.

*sepik* (masc.) 'a kind of barley bread' < Estonian *sepik*.

Verbs are borrowed extremely seldom; borrowed stems usually end in *-a* or *-e*. Borrowed verbs have been registered in the Perfect only. The use of the auxiliary (*zain* or *hobn*) with participles formed from borrowed stems does not deviate from the rules: *er iz getulet aheim* 'he came home' (*getulet* < *tulema*, stem *tule-*); *a meser iz aropgelangen* 'a knife fell' (*gelangen* < *langema*, stem *lange-*); *zi hot geerastat di dire* 'she has privatized her apartment' (*geerastat* < *erastama*, stem *erasta-*).

#### 4.4.3. Mild interference from Estonian

According to U. Weinreich (1953: 50), mild interference is a change of the expression of a sign on the model of a cognate in a language in contact, without effect on the content (Yiddish *vakatsie* > American Yiddish *vakeišn*). To my best knowledge, the notion of mild interference has not been discussed much in relevant literature on language contacts. In our case, as will become clear from further examples, the concept can be helpful for description of certain lexical components.

Mild interference from Estonian in Estonian Yiddish occurs in two groups of lexical items: first, in so-called international words of Greek and Latin origin, and, second, in words which have their Germanic counterparts in Estonian (i.e., items borrowed into Estonian from Low, High, Baltic and Standard German).

Mild interference of the first type can be demonstrated by the following examples:

*intonatsió:n* 'intonation' < Estonian *intonatsiõon*, cf. Yiddish *intonátsie*; *kostú:m* 'costume' < Estonian *kostúüm*, cf. Yiddish *kostjúm*; *laborató:rium* 'laboratory' < Estonian *laboratóorium*, cf. Yiddish *laboratórje*; *matemá:tika* 'mathematics' < Estonian *matemáatika*, cf. Yiddish *matemátik*; *süsté:m* 'system' < Estonian *süstéem*, cf. Yiddish *sistém*.

The second type is of much more interest for contact linguistics, because one can expect mild interference in international words to occur in most contact situations. In order to understand why mild interference of the second type occurs

(for instance, Estonian Yiddish *ket* 'chain' < Estonian *kett* < German *Kette*, cf. Yiddish *keit*), we shall employ the concept of linguistic neutrality.

The term *linguistic neutrality* was introduced by C. M. Scotton in 1976 (quoted from Appel & Muysken 1988: 129) and described in detail by Appel and Muysken (1988: 129-137). Linguistic neutrality, on the one hand, refers to similarities in the structures of two languages and, for example, makes code-switching possible; on the other hand, neutrality can be understood as a result of using auxiliary strategies when incorporating foreign items (Andersson 1993: 251-252). In our case, we shall use the term in the former meaning.

As was demonstrated by Andersson (1993) in her study of American and Finnish minorities in Gothenburg, the overlapping, or neutral area (in morphology, phonology or lexicon) facilitates code-switching, borrowing and incorporation of borrowed items, whereas the neutral area between typologically different languages such as Finnish and Swedish may be quite substantial due to long-established contacts.

Estonian, though typologically different from Yiddish, has a long history of contact with Germanic languages (Low German, High German, Baltic German, Standard German, Swedish); borrowings from these sources constitute a significant part of the Estonian lexicon. Some lexical items sound identical and have the same or a similar meaning in both languages:

Yiddish *hering* 'herring' and Estonian *heeringas* (< German *Hering*); Yiddish *laien* 'to lend' and Estonian *laenama* (stem *laen-* < Germanic); Yiddish *mon* 'poppy' and Estonian *moon* (< German *Mohn*); Yiddish *ring* 'ring' and Estonian *ring* 'circle' (<MLG or German *Ring*); Yiddish *rixtn zix* 'to expect, to count on', 'to intend' and Estonian *rihtima* (stem *rihti-* < German *richten*).

Thus, an overlapping area in lexicon, on the one hand, and a high degree of bilingualism among Yiddish-speakers, on the other, make it possible to borrow words of German stock from Estonian. This is also a way for Low Germanisms to enter Estonian Yiddish.

In the following cases original Yiddish lexical items have been replaced by Estonian counterparts of Low, High and Standard German origin:

*ingver* 'ginger' < Estonian *ingver* < MLG or Baltic German *Ingwer* (Mägiste 1982-1983: 511), cf. Yiddish *ingber*, *imber* (Stuchkoff 1950: 243).

*ka:rt* 1) 'card', 2) 'map', 3) 'playing card' < Estonian *kaart* < German *Karte*, ? LG *kaart* (Mägiste 1982-83: 526), LG *kaart* (Raun 1982: 25), cf. Yiddish *kartl*, *karte*, *kort*.

*kast* 'box' < Estonian *kast* < MLG *kast*, cf. Yiddish *kastn*.

*ket* 'chain' < Estonian *kett* < German *Kette* (Mägiste 1982-83: 791), cf. Yiddish *keit*.

*kru:s* 'mug' < Estonian *kruus* < MLG *kruus*, *krôs* (Mägiste 1982-83: 1001), cf. Yiddish *krug*.

*lamp* 'lamp' < Estonian *lamp* < MLG *lampe* (Raun 1982: 69), cf. Yiddish *lomp*.

*pa:r* 'pair', 'couple' < Estonian *paar* < MLG *pâr*, German *Paar* (Mägiste 1982-83: 1864-1865), cf. Yiddish *por*.

*vorst* 'sausage' < Estonian *vorst* < MLG *worst* (Mägiste 1982-83: 3921-3922), cf. Yiddish *voršt*.

An empirical constraint concerning words of Germanic origin, where mild interference from Estonian does not occur, can be formulated: a Yiddish word and its Estonian counterpart should not be very distant phonetically, i.e. *\*se:p* 'soap' < Estonian *seep* (< MLG *sêpe*), cf. Yiddish *zeif*, or *\*kri:t* 'chalk' < Estonian *kriit* (< MLG *krîte*), cf. Yiddish *kraid*.

#### 4.5. Pan-Balticisms

As is claimed by Jacobs (1994), a researcher of any language or dialect in the Baltic region must consider the question of pan-Balticisms, if not a Baltic *Sprachbund*. The importance of this statement for Baltic, Balto-Finnic and, last but not least, Yiddish linguistics becomes especially explicit in the light of research conducted by Ariste (1970), Lemchen (1995), Kiparsky (1936). It is also clear that when discussing the Baltic *Sprachbund*, North-eastern Yiddish dialects should be included.

The importance of Baltic German and Baltic sources for North-eastern Yiddish research was demonstrated above. In addition, it is necessary to stress the importance of Balto-Finnic sources.

Let us consider the following example: *kadigos*, *kadagines*, *kadik* 'juniper' was supposed by Kalmanovitsh (1926: 183) to be a loan from Latvian. Lemchen (1995: 102) found this unlikely and suggested a Baltic German origin for Courland Yiddish *kadik* (< Baltic German *Kaddik*).

However, this is an example of a pan-Balticism deriving from Balto-Finnic stock: according to Mägiste (1982-83: 635-636), Estonian *kadakas* 'juniper' corresponds to Finnish *kataja*, Livonian *kadaG*, Votic *kataga*, Karelian *kadaja* etc.; being a word of Proto-Balto-Finnic origin, it was later borrowed into the Baltic languages and into Baltic German as well. Evidently the etymon was borrowed, respectively, into Courland Yiddish via Baltic German and into Lithuanian Yiddish via Lithuanian. Its origin, however, is Balto-Finnic and not Baltic or Baltic German.

Another case of borrowing into several languages, including Courland Yiddish, was described by Jacobs (1994). Courland Yiddish for 'windowpane', *raut*, is argued as having been borrowed from Swedish *ruta* 'square', 'windowpane' as *ru:t* and later, when a shift from Low to High German occurred, as having been reinterpreted according to the pattern Low German *u:* > High German *au* (*hu:s* 'house' – *haus*). The example of Estonian *ruut* 'windowpane', 'square' < Swedish *ruta* strengthens the claim. We have to add that Estonian Yiddish has *raut* (*rout*) and *ru:t*, the latter being an interferential form from Estonian.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS

As was demonstrated, Estonian Yiddish, though with few speakers, is important for the study of North-eastern Yiddish dialects and should be considered in this context.

Being derived from Courland Yiddish, Estonian Yiddish has retained some typical Courland features in phonology, morphology and lexicon up to today. The presence of front rounded vowels in Estonian Yiddish, however, remains unexplained.

Contacts with Low German and Baltic German have left a significant trace in the lexicon, providing a contrast with other Yiddish dialects: *kaneil* 'cinnamon', cf. *tsimt*; *i:blen zix* 'to be nauseated', cf. *eklen*; *redel* 'ladder', cf. *leiter*. Low Germanisms can also have entered Estonian Yiddish also via Estonian: *kru:s* 'mug' < Estonian *kruus* < MLG *krûse*. This occurs due to the vast area of linguistic neutrality between Estonian and the typologically different Germanic languages, provided by long-established contacts and a high degree of bilingualism among Yiddish-speakers.

Due to the peculiarities of the socio-cultural situation in the Baltics, Estonian Yiddish has been a subject of heavy German (Baltic German, Standard German) influence on the lexicon. On the other hand, the number of Slavisms is small, though some old Slavisms (*zeide* 'grandfather', *kitke* 'challa') are a part of the lexicon.

Almost all Lithuanianisms registered in Estonian Yiddish by P. Ariste (1970) have disappeared, which fact explicitly illustrates the urgency of Yiddish dialect research.

It was shown that the impact of Estonian is manifold and does not mean plain borrowings into Yiddish; Estonian acts as a mediator of Low Germanisms.

The origin of the etymon *kadik* 'juniper' was initially ascribed to Baltic German; however, the source of borrowing into Baltic German and into the Baltic languages was Balto-Finnic (probably Estonian). In the case of *nuke* 'chunk of bread' the source of borrowing into Estonian and into the Baltic languages (and later, into Yiddish) was Low German. Along with the example of *raut* 'window-pane' of Swedish origin, as was argued by Jacobs (1994), these cases show the importance of all the languages of the Baltic region for research into North-eastern Yiddish dialects.

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