

YIDDISH VARIETIES IN THE LIVONIAN CONTACT AREA

Anna Verschik

Tallinn University, EE

annave@tlu.ee

Abstract. The aim of this article is to discuss the Yiddish varieties of Courland and Estonia in the general context of the co-territorial languages: Baltic German, Latvian, Livonian, and Estonian. As a rule, discussion of Yiddish in the region is mostly based on the classical descriptions of the Yiddish varieties from the beginning of the 20th century. It is demonstrated that common features in phonology and lexicon of Courland (and Estonian) Yiddish and Baltic German are, in fact, regional and attested at least in varieties of Estonian but often in Latvian and Livonian as well. It is argued that due to the multilingualism of Jews in the region, a wider perspective of modern contact linguistics and multilingualism and analysis is needed. In the 20th century, multilingual speech was a norm at least among Estonian Jews, and, based on fieldwork data from the 1990s among multilingual Estonian Jews, there is no clear preference of insertional or alternational code-switching. However, if alternational code-switching is preferred in a community, it might explain the low number of conventionalised lexical borrowings (as is the case for Latvian borrowings in Yiddish).

Keywords: language contacts, multilingualism, Baltic region, Yiddish

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12697/jeful.2022.13.1.07>

1. Introduction

Despite recent studies on the development of Yiddish in the Baltic area (Jacobs 1994, 2001, Lemxén 1995) and research into the multilingualism of Jews in the Baltic countries and contacts of Yiddish (Verschik 2003, 2020), Yiddish is not yet integrated into the general discussion of the linguistic history of the region. The reasons are twofold: first, the traditional isolation of the fields of linguistic inquiry, second, the linguistic barrier: scholars in Yiddish linguistics as a rule are not proficient in Estonian and Latvian (let alone Livonian) and scholars in Baltic and Finnic languages do not know Yiddish and the relevant literature.

The aim of this article is to place the local varieties of Yiddish, that is, Courland Yiddish (CourlY) and its offshoot, Estonian Yiddish (EstY), into the general linguistic context of the region. According to Lemchenas¹ (1970: 21), there is no Yiddish dialect of Latvia, and the notion of CourlY is used in Yiddish linguistics. CourlY was spread outside Courland (i.e., the province of Livonia, Estonia); as for Latgale, from the point of view of both Jewish and non-Jewish culture and history, it was a completely different region under the rule of Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth where the high languages were Polish and later Russian, and a variety of NEY close to those of Belarus and Lithuania proper was spoken.

I am going to expand on the findings and reflections by Jacobs (1994, 2001). To a great extent, Jacobs (2001) draws conclusions based on the classical studies of Yiddish dialects (Kamanoviš 1926 and Vajnrajx 1923 on Courland, partially Mark 1951; Lemchenas 1970, Lemxen 1995 on Lithuania) and only to a smaller extent on contemporary fieldwork (Jacobs 1994, observations on a speaker of CourlY in USA). I believe that my fieldwork on EstY in the 1990s and with the multilingualism of Lithuanian Jews in the 2010s, especially, witnessing of and participation in multilingual conversations, would be helpful for shedding light on the contacts of Yiddish with the co-territorial languages, i.e., Estonian, Livonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Baltic German. It will be demonstrated that several features of CourlY (and EstY) that are considered as a direct or indirect influence of Baltic German are in fact present in several or all of the languages of the region.

The article is organised as follows: first, a brief history of the Jewish settlement in the region as well as characterisation of North-Eastern Yiddish (NEY) dialects is provided and the place of CourlY and EstY within NEY is outlined. This is followed by a discussion of changes/retention of Yiddish dialectal features and similarities/differences with the co-territorial languages. In the end, Jewish multilingual speech and its implication for the general understanding of language contacts in the region is discussed.

1 The rendition of the cited authors' names differ depending on whether the cited work appeared in Yiddish or in a language that uses the Latin script. For example, it is Chackelis Lemchenas when quoting his Lithuanian-language work and Xatskl Lemxen when quoting his Yiddish-language publications.

2. Sociocultural history

Jews apparently arrived in Courland from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 16th (Ariste 1937, Dribins 1996: 8) or 17th century (Kalmanoviš 1926: 166). According to Dribins (1996: 8), the first Jewish settlement in what is now Latvia appeared after the Livonian War (1558–1883) when the territories became a part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; the first Jewish settlement was in the vicinity of Piltene in Courland (see also Šteimanis 1995: 16). CourlY is an off-shoot of so-called Zameter Yiddish (ZY; Mark 1951), an area more or less corresponding to Lithuanian Žemaitija (Samogitien in German). Courland became a part of the Russian Empire in 1795. Kalmanoviš (1926) claims that CourlY is, in fact, the same variety as ZY; Lemchenas (1970: 22–23) agrees that many features are shared by the two varieties, yet he believes that the differences started increasing after the 1829 restrictions on Jews from other areas settling in Courland. Courland and the territories to the north – present-day northern Latvia and Estonia – remained outside the Pale of Settlement (the most western parts of the Russian Empire annexed after the partitions of Poland where Jews were allowed to reside; it existed in various forms 1791–1917).

CourlY is more phonologically conservative (see below). There are two significant factors in the further development of the variety: (1) the lack of a co-territorial Slavic population (the same is true for Jews in ethnographic Lithuania) and (2) contacts with Baltic German, a closely related and sociolinguistically dominant variety (for more on Baltic German-Yiddish contacts see Ariste 1937, Kiparsky 1936, Verschik 2004).

Earlier sources claim that the Jews of Courland and Livonia spoke German (discussed in Vajnrajx 1923). Vajnrajx (1923) claims that they spoke a separate Yiddish variety of Courland, distinct from German. According to modern views on multilingualism, especially in the case of two closely related varieties in contact, linguistic borders are not always clear, and in-between modes of speech may emerge (Backus 1999, Clyne 2003: 162 ff. on the facilitation of transfer based on material and structural similarity). For the speakers of other NEY varieties, CourlY (and EstY) may sound more *dajtsmeriš* (German-like; see Jacobs 2001: 303–304); this is a fact of folk linguistics that should not be taken at face value. Indeed, CourlY is distinct from German and other NEY varieties,

yet multilingual community norms and actual linguistic behaviour may differ from what is believed or desired by language planners and speakers of other varieties. Clearly, in the 20th century there were Jews of German (or Russian) cultural orientation and those who advocated Yiddish (or Hebrew) as well as those who switched between different languages, including Yiddish and German.

Since the Jewish communities of Courland, Livonia, and Estonia were relatively new and situated outside of the Pale of Settlement, Courland Jews (and Estonian Jews) belonged to a so-called intermediate type. According to Mendelsohn (1983: 242–244), after the Jewish Enlightenment in the 18th century and the guarantee of equal rights in Western Europe, Jews gradually lost Yiddish, switched to the majority language, and were perceived as a religious group (“Germans of Mosaic persuasion”), while in the Russian Empire Jews did not have the same rights as gentiles, and the traditional way of life, Jewish learning, etc. was preserved in so-called shtetls (Yiddish *štetl* ‘little town’); “an East European market town in the possession of a Polish magnate, inhabited mostly but not exclusively by Jews”, starting from the partitions of Poland became “subject to Russian bureaucracy” (Petrovsky-Shtern 2015).

The former type is called Western, the latter Eastern. The intermediate type combines some characteristics of both: the Jews of Courland belonged to the middle class, lived in cities dominated by Baltic Germans, and had proficiency in co-territorial languages, were less traditional, yet considered themselves as a separate ethnic group (hence, no “Latvians of Mosaic persuasion”). As Mendelsohn (1983: 243) has it, “they were much more Jewish by culture and by identity than were the Jewries of Hungary or even of the Czech lands”.

During the first period of independence of the Baltic states (1918–1940), all major Jewish political movements (Yiddishism, various strands of Zionism) were represented in Latvia and to some extent in Estonia. Education in Yiddish and Hebrew was available, and school statistics show the decline of prestige of the former dominant languages, Russian and German, in favour of Estonian/Latvian and Yiddish/Hebrew (Mendelsohn 1983: 251, Verschik 1999a).

While Standard Yiddish spread through education, and some levelling of dialectal differences occurred (Jacobs 1994), it cannot be claimed that regional features completely disappeared. Not all speakers

of CourlY or EstY were Yiddishists and not all cared about modern Standard Yiddish. The period of existence of secular Yiddish schools in Eastern Europe was too short (i.e., only in the inter-war era) for Standard Yiddish to become everyone's preferred variety. In the 1990s-early 2000s in Estonia, for instance, all Yiddish speakers were speakers of the regional variety, even if familiar with the standard.

3. CourlY and EstY among NEY dialects

3.1. Phonology

NEY dialects have four phonological features that render them distinct from other dialect groups: (1) loss of vowel length; (2) unrounding *öü* > *ej*; (3) raising *au* > *ou*; (4) half-fronting *ou* > *oj* (Jacobs 2001: 290; Herzog 1965: 104). NEY dialects, popularly labelled as *litviš jidiš* 'Lithuanian Yiddish' are not uniform: they were spoken on a vast territory that included the present-day Baltic countries, Belarus, parts of Poland, and northern Ukraine. Mark (1951: 432), talking about the dialects of ethnographic Lithuania, differentiates ZY (see above), *stamlitviš* 'Yiddish dialect of Lithuania proper' and *sualker jidiš* 'dialect of the area called Suvalkija'. For the present discussion, ZY is most relevant, as it was spoken in the area adjacent to Courland.

According to Jacobs (2001), only (1) is partially present in ZY/CourlY. EstY has retained this distinction, cf. *zun* 'sun' vs. *zu:n* 'son'.

Vajnrajx (1923) describes CourlY diphthongs *öü* ~ *öj* (*köüfn* 'to buy', cf. general NEY *kejfn*, Standard Yiddish *kojfn*) and *au* (*hauz* 'house', cf. general NEY *hujz*, Standard Yiddish *hojz*).

CourlY has *äj* instead of *ej* (*äjbik* 'eternal', cf. general NEY *ejbik*). According to Bin-Nun (1973: 98), this is a result of Baltic German impact. Weinreich (1958: 254–255) explains it in terms of internal push-chain development. The matter remains unresolved but indeed Baltic German has the very same diphthong.

CourlY *r* is lingual and not uvular, as in most Yiddish varieties, and soft, alveolar *l* is the same as in German (Kalmanoviš 1926: 168–169, see discussion in Jacobs 2001: 300). These features are considered as marked, and other speakers of Yiddish who pronounce *r* and *l* differently are labelled as *zameter* 'speakers of ZY/ Jews from Žemaitija',

regardless of their real background; Kalmanovič (1926) calls CourlY *l* and *r* “real Courland sounds”. Lemxen (1995: 33) claims that realisation of *l* poses a continuum in Lithuania: the more to the east, the more velar it becomes.

I will return to these features in Section 4 in the discussion of regional features beyond Yiddish.

Finally, a distinct feature of NEY is the so-called *sabesdiker losn* ‘Sabbath language’, that is, the confusion of hissing and hushing consonants. CourlY shows a clear pattern here, as well: words of Slavic and Hebrew origin have *š* and words of Germanic origin follow the German pattern (Weinreich 1952): *kisn* ‘pillow’, cf. German *Kissen* and *mišn* ‘to mix’, cf. German *mischen*. Voiced *ž* becomes either voiceless *š* or *z*: common Yiddish *blondžen* ‘to wander, to stray’ becomes *blondzen*. The feature is systematically maintained in EstY.

In sum, speaking about the phonology of CourlY and EstY, one has to concur with the observation by Jacobs (2001: 290): the transition from ZY to CourlY is gradual, and “the more Yiddish approaches the Baltics, the more we see the maintenance of the earlier state of affairs”.

3.2. Morphology

In morphology, distinct features of NEY are (1) disappearance of the neuter and (2) syncretism of the dative and accusative (Wolf 1969). As Jacobs (1990) demonstrates, (1) led to a much more complex system than re-distribution of neuter nouns between masculine and feminine genders (see also a seminal paper by Weinreich 1961). Across NEY, there is variation in gender assignment. As for (2), according to Wolf (1969: 123–124), an area tentatively called Northern of NEY exists where the dative is generalised for personal pronouns and the accusative for definite articles. Hence, Northern NEY *ix ze dir* (dative) ‘I see you’, cf. other varieties and standard *ix ze dix* (accusative); *mit di lererke* ‘with the teacher (feminine)’ (accusative), cf. *mit der guter lererke* (dative). The area in question corresponds to the territories of the present-day Baltic countries.

Morphology is less relevant for the contacts with co-territorial languages in the sense that no inflectional morphology has been borrowed (see summary in Jacobs 2001: 305). However, impact of other languages on grammatical constructions/patterns (i.e., argument

structure, word order, etc.) may occur by the means of reorganisation of the existing material according to other language models. Grammatical impact of co-territorial languages on Yiddish differs depending on the language pairs and is local, not regional: for instance, past tense auxiliary loss in Yiddish-Lithuanian bilinguals (Verschik 2014) does not occur in Estonian-Yiddish contacts. In Lithuanian, the perfect tense auxiliary *būti* ‘to be’ is optional, while in Estonian the respective verb *olema* ‘to be’ is compulsory. Still, some instances potentially have a regional dimension: for instance, contacts with Estonian, a language that has no article (or grammatical gender) may have some influence on article use in EstY (Verschik 2003); in the view that all languages of the region – with the exception of Baltic German – are article-less, it would be instructive to look into naturalistic Yiddish speech (see more in Section 4.2).

3.3. Lexicon

Lexicon is the most dynamic subsystem of language and it is well known that contact-induced language change in the case of language maintenance starts from lexical borrowing (Matras 2009, Thomason & Kaufman 1988). Vajnrajx (1923) and Kalmanovitš (1926) discuss lexical items of Low German origin in CourlY. ZY has a substantial number of Lithuanian-origin items (Lemchenas 1970, Lemxen 1995), of which some “travelled” together with speakers to Courland (and Estonia, see Ariste 1970). There is a clear tendency: where other NEY varieties have Slavic origin items, ZY has Lithuanian or German ones (Mark 1951: 442, see also Jacobs 2001: 296–297): for instance, *stam litviš* has Slavicisms *paše* ‘pasture’, *štšur* ‘rat’, while ZY has *vajd* and *rats* respectively.

EstY in the 1990s had very few Lithuanian lexical items, and the tendency for preference of (Low) German lexical items instead of Slavicisms was rather prominent. Verschik (1999b: 282–283) notes that frequently Estonian has the same lexical borrowings from (Low) German. Jacobs (1994: 93, 2001: 304) introduces a relevant notion of pan-Balticisms, i.e., lexical items spread in the area from Hanseatic times or even earlier. For instance, he suggests that the purported Low-Germanism in CourlY *raut* ‘window pane’ (cf. common Yiddish *šojb*) may in fact be a Scandinavianism, traced back to Swedish times (the

stem vowel *-u* in Estonian *ruut* ‘windowpane’, ‘square’ (genitive *ruudu*) suggests a source in an oblique form of older Swedish weak nouns). The shared lexicon will be discussed in Section 4.

Finally, Lemchenas (1970: 35), based on Vajnrajx (1923) and Kalmanoviš (1926), notes that CourlY has only a few lexical items of Latvian origin: *priade* ‘pine tree’ < Latvian *priede*; *bruklene* ‘lingonberry’ < Latvian *brūklene*; *kaudze* ‘pile’ < Latvian *kaudze*; according to Lemchenas (1970: 23–24), some lexical items in CourlY may be both of Lithuanian and Latvian origin, for instance, *rupenen* ‘to worry’, cf. Lithuanian *rūpėti*, Latvian *rūpēt*.

The very small number of Latvian (and the apparent lack of Livonian) lexical loans does not mean a lack of contact between Jews and Latvians (or Livonians) (see also the remark by Jacobs 2001: 304 about economic relations with Latvians and Lazerson 1942, to be discussed below). It should be added that the older studies discussed above were conducted at a time when synchronic contact-induced language change and multilingual speech were not yet at the focus of linguistic research. I will return to this in Section 5.

3.4. Yiddish impact on the co-territorial languages

The impact of Yiddish on the co-territorial languages appears to be minimal and only on a lexical level. In certain instances, it is possible to prove that the source of a borrowing into Baltic German was specifically CourlY because of phonological shape: consider *blondzen* ‘to wander, to stray’ in Baltic German, which most probably originates from CourlY because it shows the Courland version of *sabesdiker losn* (Kiparsky 1936, see Ariste 1937 and discussion in Jacobs 2001: 304). Baltic German has lexical borrowings from Yiddish (see more in Verschik 2004) but these are also attested in other varieties of German outside the Baltic region and probably were not borrowed independently from the local varieties of Yiddish. Ariste (1972) questions the German origin of the word *pekele* ‘a little package’ in Latvian and demonstrates that it is most probably a lexical borrowing from Yiddish.

The fact that the impact of Yiddish is rather tiny can be explained by asymmetric multilingualism: Jews were more likely to be proficient in the co-territorial languages at least to some extent than non-Jews in Yiddish.

4. Expanding the context

Based on the previous section, one may notice that it is mostly the impact of (Baltic) German and the rather limited impact of Lithuanian on CourlY (and ZY), which is discussed in the classical studies and the summarising studies by Jacobs (1994, 2001). In this section it will be demonstrated that the same phenomena in phonology and lexicon are also present in other languages of the region (either in Estonian, Latvian, and Livonian at the same time or at least in one of them). In some cases, the source of influence is unknown or difficult to establish, and multiple causation is possible, but what is significant is the presence of a given feature or lexical item in at least three languages.

4.1. Phonology

Concerning the short-long vowel opposition, Jacobs (1994: 95) claims that it was collapsing in CourlY because of the impact of Standard Yiddish and the rest of NEY. Jacobs (2001: 297) mentioned that co-territorial languages (i.e., Baltic German and Latvian, but for the accuracy of the argument Livonian should be added here as well) could have played a role in the retention of short-long vowel opposition but this does not account for instability of vowel length in Courland. Indeed, exposure to Standard Yiddish occurred at Yiddish-medium schools but not all Yiddish-speaking children attended such schools (Dribins 1996: 21 shows that in 1936–1937 about 80% of Jewish school children studied in Jewish schools but these included both Hebrew and Yiddish-medium education). Based on the data from the fieldwork conducted in the 1990s–2000s in Estonia, EstY clearly shows a different pattern (Verschik 1999b). The retention of the feature in Estonia may still be explained by Jewish multilingualism in co-territorial languages and sociocultural distinctions (i.e., self-description of Estonian Jews as *baltiše* ‘Baltic’, different from “Lithuanian Jews”). Thus, (Low) German origin lexical items in Estonian preserve vowel length and this may contribute to its retention in EstY: EstY *bu:d* ‘store’, cf. Low German *bode* ‘booth’, ‘small workshop or store’ and Estonian *pood* with the same meaning and the same origin.

The diphthong *au*, attested in CourlY, is realised in EstY as *au* but most often with the first component lower than *o* and higher than *a*

(henceforth designated as *âu*). The same realisation is present in the Estonian islands dialect, Courland Livonian and, as it appears, also in Baltic German (Ariste (1936) mentions that Estonians who had received education in German-medium schools tend to substitute common Estonian *au* with its Baltic German realisation with the first component higher than normal for Estonian).

The “real Courland sounds”, i.e., lingual *r* and alveolar soft *l* are characteristic of EstY as well. Lingual *r* is present not only in Baltic German but also in Estonian, Latvian, and Livonian; as for alveolar *l*, it is characteristic of Baltic German, Estonian, and partially Livonian (for the latter, see Tuisk 2016: 124, 126).

The maintenance of the diphthong with front rounded vowels *öü* ~ *öj*, mentioned in the previous section for CourlY, is also valid for EstY. While the feature was supported by Baltic German, it has to be mentioned that Livonian also had the rounded vowels *ö* and *ü* (Norvik et al. 2021: 60) and unrounding happened probably in the 19th century (Tuisk 2016: 126). Estonian has the same vowels, and proficiency in Estonian (and, among some Yiddish-speakers, also in German) might have supported the maintenance of the diphthong in question. In addition to that, some lexical items that have front rounded vowels in German also retain them in EstY: *tsvölf* ‘twelve’, cf. German *zwölf*, common Yiddish *tsvelf*, *tü:r* ‘door’, cf. German *Tür*, common Yiddish *tir* (Verschik 1999b).

While these phonological features have been discussed in the early literature, there are other features that demonstrate a possible Estonian influence on EstY (Verschik 1999b). In Southern Finnic, syllable structure has become more complex than in other Finno-Ugric languages, and extra-long syllables are possible in Livonian and Estonian (Pajusalu 2022: 872). These features are: (1) gemination of voiceless obstruents *k*, *p*, *t* in intervocalic position, i.e., as in *šnukke* ‘a little face’, *xuppe* ‘wedding canopy’, *tatte* ‘father’ and (2) interpretation of Yiddish words in terms of Estonian quantity. For instance, one-syllable words ending with a consonant cluster are pronounced as Estonian words of the 3rd quantity (super-long, designated with `): *vort* [ˈvort] ‘word’, cf. Estonian *sort* [ˈsort] ‘kind, sort’, *alt* [ˈalt] ‘old’, cf. Estonian *alt* [ˈalt] ‘from beneath’. Two-syllable words with both open syllables are reinterpreted as Estonian 1st quantity words, and the second syllable vowel is lengthened: *kale* ‘bride’ is pronounced as [kalè], cf. Estonian *vale* [valè] ‘wrong, false’.

Feature (1) is present not only in Estonian but also in Latvian, Livonian (see Norvik et al. 2021, Tuisk 2016), and Baltic German (Lehiste 1965). As for (2), lengthening of the second syllable vowel is also a feature of Livonian (but not Latvian) (Lehiste et al. 2007, Lehiste et al. 2008, Markus et al. 2013). Thus, although the evidence is from EstY only and most probably these two features emerged in EstY as the result of Jewish multilingualism in Estonia, they spread beyond Estonian.

4.2. Grammar

While no inflectional morphology has been borrowed into Yiddish from the co-territorial varieties, this does not mean that a structural impact is lacking altogether. Consider the use of definite and indefinite articles. As mentioned in Section 2, NEY is characterised by the loss of neuter and accusative-dative syncretism, which affected the use of definite articles. Yiddish has the indefinite article *a* for all genders and cases in the singular and a zero indefinite article in the plural, so theoretically, nothing could happen here. However, in EstY even the indefinite article may be omitted. Sometimes the definite article can also be omitted before nouns that do not pose a problem for gender assignment. Consider (1) and (2):

- (1) EstY, monolingual, indefinite article omission (modified from Verschik 2003: 360)

<i>Valga</i>	<i>iz</i>	<i>geve:n</i>	<i>klejn</i>	<i>štot</i>
Valga	be:3SG	be:PAST.PART	small	town

Cf. NEY/common Yiddish

<i>Valga</i>	<i>iz</i>	<i>geven</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>klejn</i>	<i>štot</i>
Valga	be:3SG	be:PAST.PART	INDEF	small	town

‘Valga was a small town’

- (2) EstY, monolingual, definite article omission (modified from Verschik 2003: 353)

<i>dos</i>	<i>iz</i>	<i>alts</i>	<i>nox</i>	<i>milxome</i>
this	be:3SG	all	after	war

Cf. NEY/common Yiddish

<i>dos</i>	<i>iz</i>	<i>alts</i>	<i>nox</i>	<i>di/der</i>	<i>milxome</i>
this	be:3SG	all	after	DEF	war

‘this is all after the war’

Article omission may occur in code-switching (CS) before Estonian nouns as in (3), although not all Estonian nouns pose a problem for gender assignment. If just any kind of student representative body is meant, then the indefinite article *a* is expected, as it is the same for all genders and cases (in this case, there is no gender assignment problem); however, the article is nevertheless omitted:

- (3) EstY, multilingual speech (modified from Verschik 2003: 358), Estonian in bold:

in Tartu Ülikool hot zix gebildet
 in Tartu:GEN University have:3SG REFL built.PAST.PART

üliõpilasedustus

student representation

‘At the University of Tartu, a student representative body was formed’

While we have no naturalistic speech data for contemporary or at least recent Yiddish speech in Latvia (including multilingual speech), one cannot extrapolate the collapse of the article system/tendency for article omission onto the whole area. Still, multilingualism that includes genderless and article-less languages like Estonian (or Livonian?) or article-less languages like Latvian may affect the usage of Yiddish articles. Among the co-territorial languages, only Baltic German has articles.

4.3. Lexicon

Let us return to the useful notion of pan-Balticisms, introduced by Jacobs (1994, 2001). Varieties of German have a tremendous impact on the lexicon and, to some extent, the grammar of Estonian, Latvian, and Livonian (see Winkler 2014 especially on Livonian). For instance, the “Courlandisms”, i.e., items typical for CourlY, often of Low German or Baltic German origin – registered by Kalmanovitš (1926) and Vajnrajx (1993) – appear in three, four, or all five languages; see Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of pan-Balticisms.

CourlY/ EstY	German	Estonian	Livonian	Latvian	Notes
<i>klade</i> (EstY) 'copybook', 'notebook'	Low/Baltic German <i>Kladdde</i>	<i>klade</i> '(thick) notebook'	–	<i>klade</i> 'copy- book'	Cf. Yiddish <i>heft</i> 'copybook'
<i>proln zix</i> 'to boast'	Low German <i>pralen</i> 'to boast'	<i>praalima</i> 'to boast'	–	–	Cf. Yiddish <i>barimen zix</i> 'to boast'
<i>rāut</i> 'window- pane'	Low German <i>rute</i>	<i>ruut</i> 'window- pane' 'square'	<i>rūt</i>	<i>rūts</i> 'window- pane' 'square'	Cf. Yiddish <i>šojb</i> 'windowpane' Both Swedish and Low German etymologies are proposed for Estonian
<i>redl</i> 'ladder'	Baltic German <i>Reddel/ Rettel</i> 'ladder'	<i>redel</i> 'ladder'	<i>re'ḏḏōl</i> 'ladder'	<i>redeles</i> 'ladder'	Cf. Yiddish <i>lejter</i>
<i>šnikern</i> 'to carve', 'to cut without purpose'	Low German <i>snikern</i> 'to carve for fun'	<i>niker- dama</i> 'to carve from wood', 'to craft'	<i>snikārtō</i> 'to carve from wood'	<i>snikerēt</i> 'to cut (colloq.)'	Cf. Finnish <i>nikartaa</i> ~ <i>nikaroida</i> , Swedish <i>snickare</i> ; more in Verschik (1999b: 284)

In addition to the pan-Balticisms in Table 1 where the ultimate origin is a variety of German, there are instances when a lexical item is borrowed into Baltic German from Estonian and the very same item is present in EstY. It is impossible to determine whether the source for EstY was Estonian or Baltic German. Consider Estonian *lagi* 'ceiling' > Baltic German *Lage* (Kiparsky 1936: 50, Kobolt 1990: 169) and EstY *lage*, cf. *stelje* or *balkn* in other Yiddish varieties.

So far lexical borrowings in the classical sense, i.e., conventionalised borrowed lexical items have been discussed. However, the border between one-word CS and borrowing is fuzzy, and formal criteria such as the presence/absence of morphosyntactic integration and phonological adaptation are not helpful here (see discussion in Backus 2015). Besides, Yiddish has little inflectional morphology, and this criterion cannot be a firm indicator. Any innovation, including a contact-induced one, starts in an individual's speech, and, if it is useful for certain communicative situations, may spread further. According to usage-based approaches to language contacts, the frequency of an item or pattern in the input may lead to its entrenchment in the speaker's cognition and, if the item in question is often needed in communication, it may subsequently be conventionalised. This leads to a broader discussion on multilingual naturalistic speech.

5. Multilingualism

Language contacts occur first in the cognition of a multilingual individual (Backus 2015) and not between abstract language structures. In other words, the same people systematically use different varieties. That is, Baltic German impact on CourlY is reinforced with the same impact on the other co-territorial varieties – Estonian, Latvian, and Livonian; regardless of whether Estonian (or Latvian) lexical items were borrowed into Yiddish via Baltic German or directly, the use of all or several varieties that have these particular lexical items supports their entrenchment and conventionalisation.

It is clear that Yiddish speakers constituted a minority in Courland. Towns within the Pale of Settlement often had a high share of Jews, up to half of the population or even more, but we already know that the region in question was outside the Pale, and the sociocultural profile of Courland (and Estonian) Jews differed. This means that some kind of Jewish bi- or multilingualism in one or several co-territorial languages was necessary. Indeed, Baltic German was a dominant language for a long time but it was not enough. It is reasonable to assume that Courland Jews had some command of Latvian. The statistics from the 1930s demonstrate that among Courland Jews proficiency in Latvian was common: according to Dribins (1996: 22), who refers to various Latvian

statistical sources, 62.46% of the Jews were able to speak Latvian and the numbers are especially high for Courland: in Jelgava 90.52% and Liepāja 84.4% of the Jewish population, respectively (compare to 18.6% in Daugavpils in Latgale). As of 1936, more than a half of Latvia's Jewish population was proficient in three or four languages, and 6.4% knew five or even more languages (Dribins 1996: 22).

During the interviews in Estonia in the 1990s, even the oldest informants (born in 1910–1915) claimed that already their parents were proficient in Estonian and sometimes also in its local varieties. Bilingualism or multilingualism was a common trait (either Estonian-Yiddish-Russian or Estonian-Yiddish-German or all four languages).

I am not aware of any data about proficiency in Livonian among Jews. Courland Livonian was in use in the 20th century (Blumberga 2013, quoted from Norvik et al. 2021: 39). Certainly, there were economic contacts between Jews and Latvians. Straube (1994) does not mention Livonians in particular but given the fact that Jews were economically active also in rural Courland (before the order of 1804 that forbade them to settle outside the cities of Courland), such contacts existed. Lazerson (1942) communicates a relevant fact of the local Jewish cultural geography: the city name Jelgava originates from Livonian *jalgab* 'town' (correctly: *jālgab* 'downtown', as opposed to a city on the hill), and the local Jews, aware of this, would refer to it in Yiddish as *štot* 'town'. This implies at least some familiarity with Livonian.

Jacobs (2001: 304) suggests, based on the facts provided by Lazerson (1942), that the influence of Latvian on the local Yiddish should not be underestimated. I agree that the small number of lexical borrowings from Latvian says something, but, probably, there is more to it. As mentioned, studies on CourLY date to the first half of the 20th century and were conducted in the spirit of dialectology and/or historical linguistics. To the best of my knowledge, research on naturalistic multilingual speech of Latvian Jews does not exist. Still, data from such research in Estonia may shed some light. Multilingualism was a norm for in-group communication among Yiddish-speaking Jews, and constant CS was a striking feature. Joining of new participants often brought about negotiation of language use. Example (4) is rather typical.

- (4) Participant A joins the conversation. Participant B gives information about languages used. Estonian in bold, German underlined:

A: **Tere!** *Af velxe šprax red(e)n Sie?* ‘

Hello! What language do you speak?’

B: [laughs] *Redn Sie! Af ale špraxn, **juudi keeles ka!***

‘You speak! In all languages, **in Yiddish as well!**’

This small excerpt demonstrates that switching between two closely related varieties is smooth (Clyne 2003: 162 on facilitation). Another point that follows from (4) is that CS may be of different types, a fact well known in contact linguistics.

In his seminal study, Muysken (1995, 2000) introduces the notion of insertional vs. alternational CS vs. congruent lexicalisation. When one variety is clearly dominant and occasional items from another variety appear, it is called insertional CS (recall (3) and items like *Tartu Ülikool* ‘University of Tartu’ and *üliõpilasedustus* ‘student representative body’). If, however, there are longer stretches in each variety and a switch occurs at a clause boundary, this is alternation, exemplified by the utterance by Participant B in (4) (the Estonian phrase). Congruent lexicalisation occurs when two varieties share the same pattern, for instance, word order, argument structure, etc. In that case, this common pattern can be filled in with lexical material from both varieties. It is likely to happen when closely related varieties are involved (Yiddish and German), and it is difficult or impossible to determine the main language of the utterance and to assign every lexical item to a particular variety.

Among the speakers of EstY, both insertional and alternational CS occurs, and it would be wrong to say that one of the types is preferred. Muysken (2000: 249) attempted to predict preferences, based on both structural and sociolinguistic factors (the latter include language ideologies, attitudes towards bilingual speech, and so on). He assumes that for typologically different languages alternation is a preferred strategy (Muysken 2000: 247–249). For lay people, alternation may not appear as “real mixing”, and if the community prefers language separation, preference for alternations is more likely. Although the prediction attempts are not one hundred percent reliable, it is nevertheless something that should be checked every time for all kinds of language pairs and contact situations.

It is not known what type of CS is/was preferred among CourlY speakers. If it is alternation, then it is clear why very few lexical borrowings from Latvian have been attested: lexical borrowing starts as insertional CS (typically one word) that is later conventionalised; on the other hand, it would be impossible for entire clauses and sentences (unless these have idiomatic status) to be conventionalised.

6. Conclusions

Yiddish-speakers are relatively recent in the Eastern Baltic region, yet, as was demonstrated, varieties of Yiddish gradually acquired features characteristic of other languages in the area. Some phonological features (diphthongs *öü/öi*) as well as Low German items in the lexicon emerged through contacts with Baltic German, a closely related variety. Still, co-territorial Baltic and Finnic languages have contributed to the emergence (gemination of voiceless obstruents, tendency towards foot isochrony in two-syllable words, rendition of *ou/au* as *âu*, lingual *r*, soft alveolar *l*) or preservation of older features, such as distinction between long and short vowels. While no inflectional morphology from other languages has been borrowed into Yiddish (which would require longer and more intensive contacts), there are signs of innovative grammatical patterns. These patterns appear in individual contact pairs (i.e., Yiddish-Estonian, etc.) and lack regional dimension. Still, the dynamics of article use in local varieties of Yiddish should be investigated further, using the data of naturalistic speech: all varieties of the region, except Baltic German, lack a grammatical article, while contacts with Estonian show some tendency for article omission before both Yiddish and Estonian nouns in bilingual speech.

The lexicon shows a large share of common lexical items, referred to as pan-Balticisms; these are Baltic/Low German lexical borrowings in the local Yiddish but also in Estonian, Latvian, and Livonian. Also, some lexical items borrowed from Estonian into Baltic German are present in EstY; it is not known whether the borrowing occurred straight from Estonian or via Baltic German. Commonalities are reinforced via Jewish multilingualism.

In this connection, research on multilingual speech is relevant: Yiddish speakers are/were at the same time speakers of other languages,

and at least in Estonia code-switching is a default mode for in-group communication. A study of patterns of Yiddish-X multilingual speech, with a particular focus on types of code-switching, would contribute to a general understanding of the interplay of social, individual, and linguistic factors.

References

- Ariste, Paul. 1936. Eesti praegune ühiskeelee hääldus. *Eesti Kirjandus* 30(5). 201–210.
- Ariste, Paul. 1937. Tsu der hašpoe fun jidiš af nit-jidiše špraxn. *JIVO bleter* XI.1–2. 83–85.
- Ariste, Paul. 1970. Review of Lemchenas. *Baltistica* 6(2). 250–252.
- Ariste, Paul. 1972. Vai latviešu *pekele* ir vācu aizguvums? *Baltistica* 8(2). 161–162.
- Backus, Ad. 1999. Mixed native languages: A challenge to the monolithic view of language. *Topics in Language Disorders* 19(4). 11–22. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00011363-199908000-00005>.
- Backus, Ad. 2015. A usage-based approach to codeswitching: The need for reconciling structure and function. In Gerald Stell & Kofi Yakopo (eds.), *Code-switching Between Structural and Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, 19–37. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Bin-Nun, Jechiel. 1973. *Jiddisch und die deutsche Mundarten. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des ostgalizischen Jiddisch*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110930269>.
- Blumberga, Renāte. 2013. Lībieši 19.–21. gadsimtā. In Renāte Blumberga, Tapio Mäkeläinen & Karl Pajusalu (eds.), *Lībieši. Vēsture, valoda un kultūra*, 169–204. Rīga: Līvõ Kultūr sidām.
- Clyne, Michael. 2003. *Dynamics of Language Contacts*. Cambridge: CUP. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511606526>.
- Dribins, Leo. 1996. *Ebreji Latvijā*. Rīga: Latvijas Zinātņu akadēmijas Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts.
- Herzog, Marvin I. 1965. *The Yiddish Language in Northern Poland: Its geography and history*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jacobs, Neil. 1990. Northeastern Yiddish Gender-Switch: Abstracting dialect features regionally. *Diachronica* 7(1). 69–100. <https://doi.org/10.1075/dia.7.1.05jac>.
- Jacobs, Neil. 1994. Structure, Standardization, and Diglossia: The Case of Courland Yiddish. In Dagmar C.G. Lorenz & Gabriele Weinberger (eds.), *Insiders and Outsiders. Jewish and Gentile Culture in Germany and Austria*, 89–99. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Jacobs, Neil. 2001. Yiddish in the Baltic region. In Östen Dahl & Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm (eds.), *The Circum-Baltic languages: typology and contact. Volume 1: Past and Present* (Studies in Language Companion Series 55), 285–311. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Kalmanovitš, Zelik. 1926. Der jidišer dialekt in Kurland (The Yiddish dialect in Courland). *Landoj-bux: D'r Alfred Landoj tsu zajn 75stn gebojrn tog dem 25stn november 1925 fun zajne gute-fracnt un talmidim. Šriftn fun jidišn visnšaftlexn institut 1*, Filologiče serje 1, 161–188.
- Kiparsky, Valter. 1936. *Fremdes im Baltendeutsch*. Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique de Helsingfors, XI. Helsinki.
- Kobolt, Erich. 1990. *Die deutsche Sprache in Estland am Beispiel der Stadt Pernau*. Lüneburg: Verlag nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk.
- Lazerson, Max. 1942. A bisl baltiš-jidiše geografie. *Jidiše šprax* 2(3). 84–87.
- Lehiste, Ilse. 1965. A poem in Halbdeutsch and some questions concerning substratum. *Word* 21(1). 55–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00437956.1965.11435418>.
- Lehiste, Ilse, Pire Teras, Karl Pajusalu & Tuuli Tuisk. 2007. Quantity in Livonian: preliminary results. *Linguistica Uralica* 43(1). 29–44. <https://doi.org/10.3176/lu.2007.1.04>.
- Lehiste Ilse, Pire Teras, Valts Ernštreits, Pärtel Lippus, Karl Pajusalu, Tuuli Tuisk & Tiit-Rein Viitso. 2008. *Livonian prosody*. Helsinki: Finno-Ugrian Society.
- Lemchenas, Chackelis. 1970. *Lietuvių kalbos įtaka Lietuvos žydų tarmei*. Vilnius: Mintis.
- Lemxen, Xatskl. 1995. Di hašpoe fun litviš ojfn jidišn dialekt in Lite. *Oksforder Jidiš* 3. 6–130.
- Mark, Judl. 1951. Undzer litvišer jidiš. In Mendl Sudarski (ed.), *Lite*, 429–472. New York: Kulturgezelsaft fun litviše jidn.
- Markus, Elena, Pärtel Lippus, Karl Pajusalu & Pire Teras. 2013. Three-way opposition of consonant quantity in Finnic and Saamic languages. In Eva Liina Asu & Pärtel Lippus (eds.), *Nordic prosody: proceedings of the 11th conference, Tartu 2012*, 225–234. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag.
- Matras, Yaron. 2009. *Language Contact*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511809873>.
- Mendelsohn, Ezra. 1983. *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Muysken, Pieter. 1995. Code-switching and grammatical theory. In Lesley Milroy & Pieter Muysken (eds.), *One speaker, two languages*, 177–198. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511620867.009>.
- Muysken, P. (2000). *Bilingual speech: A typology of code-mixing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Norvik, Miina, Uldis Balodis, Valts Ernštreits, Gunta Kļava, Helle Metslang, Karl Pajusalu & Evar Saar. 2021. The South Estonian language islands in the context of Central Baltic Area. *Eesti ja soome-ugri keeleteaduse ajakiri. Journal of Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics* 12(2). 33–72. <https://doi.org/10.12697/jeful.2021.12.2.02>.
- Pajusalu, Karl. 2022. Prosody. In Marianne Bakró-Nagy, Johanna Laakso, & Elena Skribnik (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to the Uralic Languages*, 869–878. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan. 2015. *The Golden Age Shtetl*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400851164>.
- Straube, Gvido. 1994. Some reports about the Hebrew minority in Latvia in the 18th and 19th centuries. *Humanities and Social Sciences. Latvia* 2(3). 22–32. <http://www.roots-saknes.lv/Ethnicities/Jews/Texts/GvidoStraube.htm> (accessed 30.12.2021).
- Šteimanis, Josifs. 1995. *Latvijas ebreju vēsture*. Daugavpils: Saule.
- Thomason, Sarah G. & Terrence Kaufman. 1988. *Language contact, creolization, and genetic linguistics*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520912793>.
- Tuisk, Tuuli. 2016. Main features of the Livonian sound system and pronunciation. *Eesti ja soome-ugri keeleteaduse ajakiri. Journal of Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics* 7(1). 121–143. <https://doi.org/10.12697/jeful.2016.7.1.06>.
- Vajnrajx, Max. 1923. Dos kurlender jidiš. Chapter 4 in: Max Vajnrajx, *Štaplen: fir etjudn tsu der jidišer šprax-visnšaft un literatur-gešixte*, 193–240. Berlin: Wostok.
- Verschik, Anna. 1999a. The Yiddish language in Estonia: past and present. *Journal of Baltic Studies* 30(2). 117–128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629779900000021>.
- Verschik, Anna. 1999b. The Yiddish Dialect in Estonia (a description). In *Fenno-Ugristica 22. Indo-European-Uralic-Siberian Linguistic and Cultural Contacts*, 265–291. Tartu: Tartu University Press.
- Verschik, Anna. 2003. On the dynamics of article use in Estonian Yiddish. *Folia Linguistica* 35(3-4). 337–369. <https://doi.org/10.1515/flin.2001.35.3-4.337>.
- Verschik, Anna. 2004. Baltendeutsche und Jiddische Sprachkontakten im Baltikum. In Hans Hecker & Walter Engel (Hrsg.), *Symbiose und Traditionsbruch. Deutsch-Jüdische Wechselbeziehungen in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa (19. und 20. Jahrhundert)*, 123–134. Essen: Klartext Verlag.
- Verschik, Anna. 2020. Yiddish–Lithuanian bilingualism: Incomplete acquisition, change through contacts, or both? *International Journal of Bilingualism*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006920932664>.
- Weinreich, Uriel. 1952. *Sábesdiker losn* in Yiddish: a problem of linguistic affinity. *Word* 8(4) 360–377. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00437956.1952.11659447>.
- Weinreich, Uriel. 1961. The seven genders of Yiddish. Linguistic Society of America, Chicago, December 29, 1961. <https://library.yivo.org/The-Seven-Genders-of-Yiddish> (accessed on 02.04.2022).
- Winkler, Eberhart. 2014. Loanword strata in Livonian. *Eesti ja soome-ugri keeleteaduse ajakiri. Journal of Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics* 5(1). 215–227. <https://doi.org/10.12697/jeful.2014.5.1.11>.
- Wolf, Meyer. 1969. The Geography of Yiddish Case and Gender Variation. In Marvin I. Herzog, Wita Ravid & Uriel Weinreich (eds.), *The Field of Yiddish* Vol. 3, 102–215. London/The Hague/Paris: Mouton & Co. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111699509-008>.

Kokkuvõte. Anna Verschik: Jidiši keelekujud liivi kontaktalal. Artikli eesmärk on kirjeldada Kuramaa ja Eesti jidiši keele variante naaberkeelte (s.o. baltisaksa, läti, liivi ja eesti keele) kontekstis. Reeglina põhineb kohalike jidiši keelekujude analüüs nn klassikalistel, 20. sajandi algusest pärit kirjeldustel. Artiklis näidatakse, et fonoloogilised ühisjooned Kuramaa ja Eesti jidišis ja baltisaksa keeles on tegelikult regionaalsed ning esinevad vähemalt eesti keeles, aga tihtilugu ka läti ja liivi keeles. Kuna tegu on mitmekeelsusega, oleks vaja laiemat, moodsa kontaktlingvistika põhist analüüsi. 20. sajandil oli vähemalt Eesti juutidele omane nn mitmekeelne kõne ning 1990ndatel kogutud välitööandmete põhjal saab väita, et ei ole kindlalt domineerivat koodivahetuse tüüpi (sisestav vs. vahelduv). Kuid siis, kui kogukonnas domineerib vahelduv koodivahetus, seletab see leksikaalsete laenude väikest arvu (nagu nt läti laenude puhul jidišis).

Märksõnad: keelekontaktid, mitmekeelsus, Balti areaal, jidiš

Kubbõvõttõks. Anna Verschik. Jidiš kīelviṭõd livõ kīel kontaktõd arāl. Kēra merk um kēraldõ Kurmõ ja Ēstimõ jidiš kīel variantidi kāimad kīeld (s.t. Baltijmõd saksā, leṭkīel, livõ ja ēsti kīel) kontekstõs. Kūoṣpēḷizt jidiš kīelviṭõd analiz alizõks ātõ n.n. irdizt 20. āigastsadā īrgandõks kēraldõkst. Kēra nāgṭõb, ku ītizt fonolõgij eṇṭssuglitõd Kurmõ ja Ēstimõ jidišõs ja Baltijmõd saksā kīels āt regionālizt ja nādõb ka ēsti kīels, saggõld ka leṭkīels ja livõ kīels. 20. āigast-sadās Ēstimõ zīḏõdõn võḷ ummi n.n. setmiṅkēḷi rõk, ja 1990. āigastis kūoṣdõd tieut pāl vaṅṭlõs võib kītõ, ku kīels pūtõb ikšāinagi dominīeriji kõd vaidimiz tīp (sizzõlpandõb vs. mõitantiji). Sīegid siz, aḷ kubgõns dominīerõb mõitantiji kõd vaidimi, se sēḷṭab piškīzt leksikālizt tāpīṅtõkst luggõ (nāgṭ. leṭkīel tāpīṅtõkst jidiš kīels).