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The Upper Functional Domain in Yiddish


Abstract

This paper examines the structure of the left edge of the clause in Yiddish, and its consequences for theories of clausal structure and functional categories. Data from verb-second, *wh*-questions, and topicalization structures motivate an approach which aligns itself with claims that the functional structure of the clause may in fact vary cross-linguistically.

1. Introduction

Since Pollock (1989), much work on clausal syntax has taken the approach of splitting functional domains into distinct functional heads for each feature. Pollock’s paper focuses on dividing the head INFL(ection) into its tense and agreement components, while Rizzi’s (1997) analysis splits the CP domain into topic and focus. Cinque (1999) develops a theory of adverb placement in which adverbs are located in the specifiers of functional categories, claiming that the resulting hierarchy of functional heads is universal. In recent work, Rizzi (2002) has referred to this overall trend in clause structure as the “cartographic approach”, in that its goals are to provide explicit and precise maps of syntactic configurations. On the other hand, there have been those who have considered the possibility that the manner in which languages deploy functional heads is not in fact universal, but may in fact be parametrized, with some languages opting (for example) for inflectional heads which host more than one feature. That is, there are some fundamental questions: Do apparently distinct syntactic positions (as reflected in linear order) necessarily correspond to distinct projections in the functional domain? Is the structure of the upper functional domain (e.g. the IP and CP “territory”) uniform across languages?

Indeed, Iatridou (1990) formulated an early response to Pollock’s original proposal raising these very questions, with the conclusion that Agr(eement) projections may not in fact be universally motivated. Among others who have investigated this matter are Van Gelderen (1993), who takes a diachronic view of functional structure, Bobaljik and Thráinsson (1998), who argue for
parametrization of the structure of INFL to account for distinctions between VO and OV Germanic languages, and Lambova (2001) who links the structure of the CP domain in Bulgarian to its discourse-oriented nature. Approaching the issue from yet another angle, Abraham (1997) calls into question the basic assumption underlying the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995 - though Chomsky himself questions the necessity of Agr phrases) that derivational functional categories (linked to case checking and agreement) are even necessary in all languages.

In this paper I investigate the structure of the “left periphery” in Yiddish in light of these various proposals. I will limit my focus to the phenomena of verb second, wh-movement, and topicalization. Space will not permit me to attempt to resolve the major theoretical questions that arise (and there are many!); I will simply concentrate on situating Yiddish within the larger context of the study of clause structure.

2. Verb Second in Yiddish

Like the other Continental West Germanic languages, Yiddish exhibits the well-known verb second property. Unlike Dutch and German, however, Yiddish shows no main/embedded asymmetry with respect to verb second; the verb appears in the second position in clauses embedded below a complementizer as well. The following examples show the verb second effect in main clauses, with the finite verb in second position being preceded by a topicalized constituent - whether it be the direct object, and adverbial, or the subject NP. Note also that unlike Dutch and German, Yiddish is VO, see Diesing (1997).

(1) a. dos bukh hot maks geleyent.
   the book has Max read
   ‘The book, Max has read.’

   b. nekhtn hot maks gezungen a lidl
   yesterday has Max sung a song
   ‘Yesterday, Max sang a song.’

c. maks vet zingen a lidl
   Max will sing a song
   ‘Max will sing a song.’

The examples here demonstrate Yiddish is a “symmetric” verb second (V2) language, in that the V2
order also holds for embedded clauses:

(2) a. *ikh veysnit tsi dos bukh hot maks geleyent.*

I know not whether the book has Max read

‘I don’t know whether Max has read the book’

b. *es iz a shod vos afile LGB hot maks nit geleyent.*

It is a shame that even LGB has Max not read

‘It is a shame that Max has not even read LGB.’

c. *zi iz gekumen zen ver frier vet kontshen.*

she is come see who earlier will finish

‘She has come to see who would finish earlier.’

d. *ir zolt visn zayn, mayne libe kinderlekh, az vayn*

you should know be my dear children that wine

*ken men makhn fun troybn oykh*

can one make from grapes too.

‘You should know, my dear children, that one can make wine from grapes also.’

It is clear from the examples that the embedded verb second is not restricted to verbs of saying, as embedded main clauses are in many languages. It even occurs in factive complements (2b) and co-occurs with embedded questions (2c). Furthermore, these examples demonstrate that the “classical” analysis of V2 as developed for German and Dutch (beginning with Bach 1962, Bierwisch 1963, Koster 1975, and many others since) in which the complementizer and the finite verb compete for the same slot in the head of CP is not viable for Yiddish, since the complementarity of distribution of the finite verb and the complementizer which motivates the classic analysis does not hold.

One possible explanation for this symmetric V2 is that Yiddish exhibits CP-recursion in embedded clauses, allowing for both the co-occurrence of V2 with complementizers and embedded questions (Vikner 1995).

(3) **CP-recursion:** $[\text{CP}_1 \text{az } [\text{CP}_2 \text{ XP V}_{\text{fin}}\ldots]]$

However, in other languages which allow CP-recursion, these structures display the properties of embedded main clauses, which is not the case for the Yiddish examples (see Iatridou and Kroch 1992 for an overview). This fact greatly weakens the CP-recursion proposal, and I will not consider it further here.

An alternative, which I proposed in Diesing 1990, is to allow the IP-domain to host either a
subject, or a fronted topic XP. This idea has also been developed for Icelandic by RÖGNVALDSSON AND THRÁINSSON (1990) and for Mainland Scandinavian by REINHOLTZ (1989), contra BRANIGAN (1996).

(4)  

While in its most basic form this approach advocates a single functional head which can license either a fronted subject NP or a non-subject XP, variants of this strategy exploit the split IP analysis of POLLOCK. For example, the landing site of a sentence-initial subject might be Spec, AgrSP, while a non-subject (A-bar) topic might land in the higher Spec,TP, see THRÁINSSON (1994) for discussion. Taking this tack would allow one to maintain the connection between AgrS and Nominative case, but see ABRAHAM (1997) for an alternative view regarding this derivational assumption. I will simply focus on the IP “zone” as the landing site for XP-fronting in V2 clauses as a phenomenon of the left periphery, without pursuing any possible links to case licensing.

A consequence of this approach is that main clauses in Yiddish have a different structure from main clauses in asymmetric V2 languages (such as German), in which all V2 results from movement to CP. Furthermore, it can be shown that within Yiddish, matrix questions and embedded questions have a different structure. Evidence for this comes in part from the fact that they display different word orders. Matrix questions show the expected V2 word order, with the wh-phrase in first position:

(5)  

a. \([ip \text{ vos}_i \text{ hot } [vp \text{ maks } \text{ gesn } t_i]]\)?
   what has Max eaten
   ‘Who ate a turnip?’

b. \([ip \text{ ver}_i \text{ hot } [vp \text{ gesn } \text{ a brukve}]]\)?
   who has eaten a turnip
   ‘I know not who has eaten a turnip.’

Embedded questions have a V3 order, with the wh-phrase preceding both the topic and the finite verb:

(6)  

a. \(ikh \text{ veys } \text{ nit } [cp \text{ vos}_i \text{ [ip \text{ maks } hot } \text{ gesn } t_r]]\]
   I know not what Max has eaten
   ‘I don't know what Max ate.’

b. \(ikh \text{ veys } \text{ nit } [cp \text{ ver } [ip \text{ es } hot } \text{ gesn } \text{ a brukve}]]\]
   I know not who ES has eaten a turnip
   ‘I don’t know who has eaten a turnip.’

These examples show that in an embedded question, there is no finite verb movement to the position to the immediate right of the wh-phrase, unlike in the matrix clause (embedded direct questions are possible in Yiddish under certain restricted circumstances, but I will not address those here, see
Santorini 1995: 78-83). In addition, with embedded subject extraction a mysterious expletive *es* ‘it’ appears, which cannot appear in matrix questions. These facts can be explained if the embedded wh-phrase moves to Spec,CP (as expected given the effects of selection on embedded interrogatives - the embedding verb selects for a +Wh CP). In essence then, what I have called the shared-IP analysis is a case of “generate only as much structure as you need” (Diesing 1990: 55). (I should note here that Grimshaw 1997 develops an analysis of clause structure which also exploits a principle minimizing structure, though within a rather different theoretical framework.)

A remaining issue is the matter of why there cannot be both a wh-phrase and a topic in a matrix clause, with IP projecting multiple specifiers. One possible answer is that while the IP-level specifier can license either a topic or a wh-phrase, it can only check one such feature. That is, it can host only one feature in any given clause. Wh-phrases and topics can co-occur in embedded clauses, since in this case the wh-feature is selected in CP by the embedding verb, leaving the IP-specifier free to host the topic feature. Thus, here we have our first departure from the strict “cartographic” approach to the functional domain espoused by Rizzi. My claim is that the IP domain can host either a wh-feature or a topic feature in matrix clauses, but not both simultaneously. This gives us the result that we do not see topics in matrix questions. Embedded questions result from wh-movement to the specifier of CP (as a result of selection), and thus are structurally compatible with co-occurring topicalization.

Allowing the specifier of IP to host both wh-features and the feature which licenses topics may seem a bit odd, given that wh-phrases are generally considered to be focus, in the sense of being “new information”, while topics are traditionally taken to instantiate “old information”. Pertinent to this apparent contradiction is the study of the discourse function of XP-fronting (what is commonly referred to as topicalization in V2 languages) in Yiddish undertaken by Prince (1999). Prince demonstrates that the XPs in initial position actually do not function as true topics in Yiddish, but in many cases instantiate a form of focus movement. While space does not allow me to present a full discussion of Prince’s findings, I will take them as providing support for the plausibility of the analysis I offer here, in that the fronted XPs and Wh-phrases may well have enough featurally in common to target the same landing site (Lambova 2001 makes a similar proposal regarding Bulgarian). Of course, movement of a wh-phrase will have to take precedence over XP-fronting, since Yiddish does not allow all wh-phrases to remain in situ, but this problem exists even in the classical analysis of V2, in which “topics” and wh-phrases target the same landing site. More importantly, the constraint against having both a Wh-phrase and a fronted XP in the specifier of IP can be reduced to the fact that IP can license only one specifier.
A bit more clarification regarding the nature of this focus movement is in order, however. In Diesing (1997) I presented evidence for a preverbal focus position to which a single constituent can move. This is rather different from the sentence-initial XP-fronting, both syntactically and interpretively. Interestingly, an in-situ wh-phrase must move there (I use here an extended sense of the phrase “in situ”, meaning “not fronted”), and in declaratives a single XP can occupy the preverbal slot (with an intonational focus):

(7) a. ver vet haynt vuhin geyn mit aykh?
   who will today where go with you?
   ‘Who will go where with you today?’

b. ver hot nekhtn vos gekoyft?
   who has yesterday what bought
   ‘Who bought what yesterday?’

c. maks hot nekhtn a bukh gelevent.
   Max has yesterday a book read
   ‘Max read a BOOK yesterday.’

An additional fact is that is not possible for more than one constituent to appear immediately before the verb and to the right of an adverb:

(8) a. *nekhtn hot maks nit dem yingl dos bukh gegeben
   yesterday had Max not the boy the book given

b. *nekhtn hot maks nit ken yingl ken bukh gegeben
   yesterday had Max not no boy no book given

Furthermore, the interpretation of the XPs in the preverbal focus position is that of what has been called contrastive focus, as opposed to the informational focus (also called “semantic focus” by Gundel 1999) represented by XP-fronting to the sentence-initial position. Both types of focus represent “new information”, but the preverbal contrastive focus is distinguished from XP-fronting in that it selects new information from a presupposed set, see Rooth (1992), rather than simply filling in new information. Thus, there is no inherent conflict (either in syntactic or interpretive terms) between the existence of the preverbal focus position and my following Prince (1999) in regarding XP-fronting as also being a form of focus movement, nor does the preverbal focus position represent evidence contradiction the Shared-IP proposal. In the next section I take a closer look at the syntax of wh-questions in Yiddish, which will require examining the next layer of the upper functional domain - that of CP.
3. *Wh*-movement in Yiddish

Beyond the word order contrasts between matrix and embedded questions noted above, the most striking feature of question formation in Yiddish arises with multiple questions - questions in which there is more than one *wh*-phrase. Multiple questions in Yiddish (in particular, the Southeastern dialect - see Diesing in press for discussion of dialectal differences with respect to multiple questions) come in two forms: both fronting of a single *wh*-phrase and multiple *wh*-fronting are allowed. The following examples illustrate the single fronting option, in which one *wh*-phrase fronts and the other remains *in situ*:

(9)  

a. *ver vet vuhin geyn mit aykh?*  
who will where go with you?  
‘Who will go where with you?’

b. *ver hot vos gekoyft?*  
who has what bought  
‘Who bought what?’

c. *ver geyt vuhin?*  
who goes where  
‘Who is going where?’

These sentences contrast with examples demonstrating multiple fronting, where both *wh*-phrases move to the position preceding the finite verb:

(10)  

a. *ver vuhin vet geyn mit aykh?*  
[Mark 1978: 380]  
who where will go with you  
‘Who will go where with you?’

b. *ver vos hot gekoyft?*  
who what has bought  
‘Who bought what?’

c. *ver vuhin geyt?*  
[Zaretski 1929]  
who where goes  
‘Who is going where?’

As I noted in Diesing (in press), these two orders for multiple questions are synonymous. In particular, the *wh*-in-situ in the single-fronting cases need not be D(iscourse)-linked (in the sense of Peetsky
1987 - the potential answers to these questions are not necessarily limited to sets of entities previously defined in the discourse), as has been claimed to be a condition on *wh-in-situ* in multiple-fronting languages like Bulgarian and Polish (Peletsky 2000).

A fundamental question in the syntax of multiple fronting in Yiddish is that of where the multiply-fronted *wh*-phrases move to. Is the landing site CP (as argued for Bulgarian by Rudin 1988 and others), or some lower functional projection such as IP (as Rudin has claimed for Polish)? In Diesing (in press) I examined evidence from the basic the word order facts in embedded questions, including the expletive that appears with subject extractions. Consider the following examples, which demonstrate that both single fronting (11a) and multiple fronting (11b-c) are possible in an embedded question.

(11) a. hot zi ni(sh)t gekent farshteyn ver es shlogt zikh mit vemen
    has she not able understand who EXP hits self with whom
    ‘(So) she couldn’t understand who was fighting with whom.’
    [Jacobs et al. 1994:414]

    b. hot zi ni(sh)t gekent farshteyn ver mit vemen es shlogt zikh
    has she not able understand who with whom EXP hits self
    ‘Let’s go where(ever) who(ever) is going.’ [Zaretsky, 1929]

Each of these examples involves *wh*-extraction from the subject position, leaving a subject gap. As noted in section 2, an expletive *es* ‘it’ is required (Birnbaum 1978, Travis 1984, Diesing 1990). The expletive does not (indeed, can not) appear if a non-subject has been topicalized (for example, in (12), the adverb *frier* ‘earlier’, or in (13) *haynt* ‘today’), occupying the [Spec,IP] position (as discussed above in section 2, also see Diesing 1990 for arguments justifying this placement of non-subject topics):

(12) zi iz gekumen zen ver frier vet kontshen. [Diesing 1990: 50]
    she is come see who earlier will finish
    ‘She has come to see who would finish earlier.’

(13) lomir geyn, ver vuhin *haynt* geyt.
    let’s go who today goes
    ‘Let’s go where(ever) who(ever) is going today.’

To summarize the point, the expletive does not appear when there is no gap in [Spec,IP], but
when such a gap does exist, the expletive is obligatory. This indicates that the landing site for the \textit{wh}-phrases is at the CP level, for if the fronted \textit{wh}-phrases were able to land in [Spec,IP] (as in Rudin’s analysis of Polish), this obligatory appearance of the expletive in the examples in (11) would be totally unexpected, as there would then be no gap. The appearance of the expletive in the multiple fronting cases demonstrates that the multiply fronted \textit{wh}-phrases are not adjoined to IP, but rather are attached higher up, at the CP level, as in Bulgarian. Furthermore, the fronted \textit{wh}-phrases form a unit which cannot be broken up (i.e. by a parenthetical), another property which Yiddish shares with Bulgarian (Rudin 1988):

\begin{equation}
\begin{array}{llll}
*ver, & nokh & dayn meynung, & vuhin & vet & geyn?
\end{array}
\end{equation}

who after your opinion where will go

This fact too is consistent with the conclusion that Yiddish multiple fronting involves movement to CP.

To account for multiple \textit{wh}-fronting, I will maintain here the proposal I made in Diesing (in press): Yiddish allows for selection of either [-multiple] or [+multiple] CP. The former allows checking of only one \textit{wh}-feature, and hence fronting of only one \textit{wh}-phrase. The latter allows checking of multiple \textit{wh}-features, leading to multiple fronting (with resulting multiple specifiers). The [+multiple] CP occurs in both embedded and matrix questions, the [-multiple] CP only in embedded contexts; in matrix single fronting questions the [Spec,IP] is the landing site for \textit{wh}-movement (following the principle of generating “only as much structure as is needed”).

Interestingly, comparison of the syntax of multiple fronting with single fronting questions provides additional evidence for the structural difference between matrix and embedded questions proposed in section 2. Although they are semantically identical, the two question strategies do display some important syntactic differences. Most notable of these concerns the phenomenon of superiority. While single-fronting questions allow an object \textit{wh}-phrase to be fronted over an \textit{in-situ} subject \textit{wh}-phrase (thus violating the superiority constraint, which requires that the \textit{wh}-phrase that is highest in the tree to move), this is not possible in the multiple-fronting case.

As Hoge (2000) demonstrates in her study of superiority effects in Yiddish and other languages, this immunity to superiority in single fronting is quite general, covering all the possible configurations. Thus, in multiple questions involving both the subject and the object, either \textit{wh}-phrase can front:

\begin{equation}
\begin{array}{lllll}
a. & ver, & hot & t, & vos gekoyft?
\end{array}
\end{equation}

who has what bought

‘Who bought what?’
b. \(\text{vos}, \text{hot, ver, t, gekoyft?}\)

what has who bought

‘Who bought what?’

Nor are superiority effects seen in interactions between object \(wh\)-phrases with \(wh\)-adverbials:

(16) a. \(\text{vos, hot, maks, vi azoy/farvos, geshpilt?}\)

what has Max how/why played

‘How/why did Max play what?’

b. \(\text{vi azoy/farvos, hot, maks, vos, geshpilt?}\)

how/why has Max what played

‘How/why did Max play what?’

Multiple questions involving a subject \(wh\)-phrase and a \(wh\)-adverbial also fail to show any superiority effects:

(17) a. \(\text{ver, hot, vi azoy/farvos, geshpilt, pyane?}\)

who has how/why played piano

‘Who played the piano how/why?’

b. \(\text{vi azoy/farvos, hot, ver, geshpilt, pyane?}\)

how/why has who played piano

‘Who played the piano how/why?’

There are also no “pure” superiority effects, in the sense of involving two \(wh\)-phrases in object positions (making it clear that superiority cannot be reduced to a requirement that traces appear in governed positions).

(18) a. \(\text{vemen, hot, der, lerer, vos, geheysn, leyenen?}\)

whom has the teacher what ordered read

‘Who did the teacher tell to read what?’

b. \(\text{vos, hot, der, lerer, vemen, geheysn, leyenen?}\)

what has the teacher whom ordered read

‘Who did the teacher tell to read what?’

The single fronting examples contrast strikingly with their multiple-fronting counterparts, in which superiority must be respected. Thus, we see that while the subject \(wh\)-phrase can precede the direct
object *wh*-phrase in the initial group of *wh*-phrases, the reverse order is ungrammatical:

(19)  

a. \( \text{ver vos hot gekoyft?} \)  
who what has bought  
‘Who bought what?’

b. * \( \text{vos ver hot gekoyft?} \)  
what who has bought

c. \( \text{ikh veys nit ver vos es hot gekoyft.} \)  
I know not who what ES has bought.  
‘I don’t know who bought what.’

d. * \( \text{ikh veys nit vos ver es hot gekoyft.} \)  
I know not what who ES has bought.

The same contrast is seen in multiple questions involving a subject and an indirect object. The superiority effect is in evidence regardless of whether the indirect object is marked simply with the dative case (a-b examples), or with a preposition (c-d examples):

(20)  

a. \( \text{ver vemen hot gegeben khanike-gelt?} \)  
who whom has given Hanukkah-money  
‘Who gave whom Hanukkah money?’

b. * \( \text{vemen ver hot gegeben khanike-gelt?} \)  
whom who has given Hanukkah-money

c. \( \text{ver tsu vemen hot geshikt leshonetoyves?} \)  
who to whom has sent Rosh Hashanah cards  
‘Who sent Rosh Hashanah cards to whom?’

d. * \( \text{tsu vemen ver hot geshikt leshonetoyves?} \)  
to whom who has sent Rosh Hashanah cards

An examination of the questioning of double objects reveals that a dative-marked indirect object is superior to the direct object:

(21)  

a. \( \text{vemen vos hot maks gegeben?} \)  
whom what has Max given  
‘What did Max give (to) whom?’

b. * \( \text{vos vemen hot maks gegeben?} \)  
what whom has Max given
The prepositional dative, on the other hand, shows the reverse superiority relation, with the direct object being superior (this contrast between dative-marked and prepositional indirect objects is consistent with the results of Barss and Lasnik 1986):

(22) a. vos tsu vemen hot maks geshikt?
   what to whom has Max sent
   ‘What did Max send to whom?’

b. *tsu vemen vos hot maks geshikt?
   to whom what has Max sent

I should note here that Yiddish does not seem to allow multiple questions with more than two *wh*-phrases; speakers tend to conjoin *wh*-phrases in excess of two. See Diesing (in press) for further discussion of this constraint.

It is misleading to characterize this asymmetry with respect to superiority simply as a contrast between single fronting and multiple fronting, however. As I showed in Diesing (in press), superiority effects are also seen with single fronting questions, but only in embedded contexts. Example (c) below shows a superiority violation in a single fronting embedded question, and it is considerably degraded in acceptability.

(23) a. hot zi ni(sh)t gekent farshteyn ver es shlogt zikh mit vemen
   has she not able understand who ES hits self with whom
   ‘(So) she couldn’t understand who was fighting with whom.’

b. hot zi ni(sh)t gekent farshteyn ver mit vemen es shlogt zikh
   has she not able understand who with whom ES hits self
   ‘(So) she couldn’t understand who was fighting with whom.’

c.*? hot zi ni(sh)t gekent farshteyn mit vemen ver shlogt zikh
   has she not able understand with whom who hits self

d.*hot zi ni(sh)t gekent farshteyn mit vemen ver es shlogt zikh
   has she not able understand with whom who ES hits self

However, (23c) is not nearly as bad as violating superiority in a multiple fronting context, as in (23d). A possible explanation for this contrast is that the superiority violating single fronting sentence is simply too similar to its multiple fronting counterpart (differing only in that the latter has the expletive *es* ‘it’ in Spec,IP). Considering examples which do not have a subject *wh*-phrase allows us to control for this factor:
Example (24a) shows a case of embedded single fronting which obeys superiority. As expected, this sentence is grammatical. The superiority-violating variant in (24b), however, is significantly worse, though again it appears that it is not judged to be quite as bad as the superiority-violating multiple fronting case in (24d).

A superiority effect is also seen with adjuncts:

These examples suggest that the determining factor for superiority effects is actually the landing site of $wh$-movement. $Wh$-movement to the specifier of CP (whether single or multiple) is subject to superiority, while $wh$-movement to the specifier of IP (as happens with single fronting matrix questions) is not subject to the superiority constraint. This difference in the properties of movement associated with the landing site supports the analysis proposed thus far. (I should note that there are further constraints on multiple fronting which, though they are extremely interesting, do not bear on the questions of functional structure being considered here, see Hoge 2000 and Diesing in press for details.)

At this point the upper functional domain of Yiddish can be schematically represented as follows:

The topmost CP layer is only generated “as needed”, indicated here by parentheses - it will only be generated in a multiple-fronting question. The matrix IP can license either a $wh$-phrase or a fronted XP
(as a result of some sort of focus movement, the finite verb also moves to the head I), but no multiple specifiers are licensed here. The embedded C is selected by the matrix verb; when a wh-complement is selected, it can be [+/- multiple]. Since the wh-feature in an embedded clause is a function of selection, an embedded IP does not license wh-movement. Both CP and IP have the potential to license “focus-related” material - whether it is a fronted XP or a wh-phrase. This structure presents an additional departure from RIZZI’s (1997, 2002) cartographic view in that there seems to be no conflict in Yiddish resulting from having two projections hosting focus-related material, as RIZZI has claimed to be the case in Italian. Italian does seem to have stricter constraints on focus, in that it seems to disallow multiple questions as well as other cases of multiple foci (CALABRESE 1984), so clearly this is a matter of cross-linguistic variation, and not a universal principle of clause structure.

4. The Left Edge of the Upper Functional Domain

The final construction I will examine involves what I will call “true” topics co-occurring with wh-questions. Specifically, Yiddish allows V3 orders in matrix clauses which result from fronting of a constituent to the left of a wh-phrase:

(27)  a. **DU**  *ver*  *bist?*  
  YOU  who  are  
  ‘Who do you think you are?’  
  [BIRNBAUM 1979: 304 (210d)]

  b. **AHIN**  *ver*  *geyt?*  
  THERE  who  goes  
  ‘Who’s going there?’  
  [ZARETSKI 1929:236]

  c. **NEKHTN**  *vu*  *bistu*  *geven?*  
  YESTERDAY  where  were-you  been  
  ‘Where were you yesterday?’

  d. **mit di KINDER**  *vos*  *tut*  *men?*  
  With the CHILDREN what  does  one  
  ‘What does one do with the children?’

Both SANTORINI (1995) and HOGE (2000) refer to these fronted XPs as “focused constituents” without discussion of any criteria for such a classification. However, sentences like these can be paraphrased in terms of “as-phrases” - “As for yesterday, where were you?”, “As for the children, what does one do
with them?”. I take this to indicate that they actually function as discourse topics. I will therefore regard them as “true” topics.

There are some constraints on the syntax of this topic-fronting. As Hoge (2000) points out, only one such topic phrase can be placed to the left of the $wh$-phrase:

\[(28)\]  
\[a.*\] mit di kinder nekhtn vu bistu geven?  
with the children yesterday where were-you been  
\[b.*\] shabes bay nakht in vald ver fun aykh vet geyn?  
Saturday night in forest who of you will go

This restriction contrasts with topicalization in Italian, which is recursive (Rizzi 1997), but corresponds to constraints on a possibly analogous construction in Kashmiri, another symmetric V2 language (Bhatt 1999, in particular the discussion on pp. 107-116). Note also that topic-fronting is compatible with multiple $wh$-fronting:

\[(29)\] SHABES BAY NAKHT ver vuhin vet geyn mit aykh?  
Saturday night who where will go mith you

‘Who will go where with you on Saturday night?’ [Hoge 2000]

(Interestingly enough, Kashmiri also allows optional multiple-fronting, which can co-occur with sentence-initial topics.) A further constraint demonstrated by Hoge (2000) is that topic-fronting of this sort is not possible in embedded questions:

\[(30)\] *Reyzl fregt zikh NEKHTN vu du bist geven.  
Rose asked self YESTERDAY where you are been

Bulgarian (Lambova 2001: 356) also allows topic phrases to precede fronted $wh$-phrases, but in contrast to Yiddish (but similarly to Italian), multiple topics are allowed.

Both Lambova and Bhatt argue that the topics are moving to the same projection as the fronted $wh$-phrases, mainly on the basis of the impossibility of intervening material appearing between the topic and the $wh$-phrase(s). In terms of implementation, the target of $wh$-movement can host both a topic feature and a $wh$-feature. In Bulgarian, either, or both of the features can be [+multiple], in Kashmiri only the $wh$-feature can be [+multiple]. This idea can be extended to Yiddish by positing that the CP projection can host both the topic and $wh$-features (as I argued above in section 2 for IP), but CP, unlike IP, can host both features at the same time. The occurrence of the left-edge topic in an indirect question will be ruled out, however, by locality constraints on selection - an intervening topic feature blocks the required selection configuration between the matrix verb and the embedded $wh$-feature. This gives us
the following structure for the functional domain:

\[(31) \quad ([\text{CP} \text{XP}_{\text{multipleTopic}} \text{WhWh} \text{C}_{\text{multiplTopic}+\text{multipleWh}}] [\text{IP} \text{XP/Wh} \text{I}_{\text{focus/wh}} [\text{VP} \text{C}_{+/\text{multipleWh}} [\text{IP} \text{XP} \text{I}_{\text{focus}} ]]])]\]

The co-occurrence of Topic and wh-phrases in CP in matrix clauses is ruled out by minimality: the IP projection (which is closer to the unmoved wh-phrases) is a potential target for wh-movement, and therefore must be the target for wh-movement, since moving to the higher target (CP) would be moving further than is necessary (crucial to this explanation is the fact that there is no selection requirement forcing the wh-features to appear in CP).

5. Conclusions

While this paper represents only a sketch of the structure of the left periphery in Yiddish, with many questions remaining to be answered, it does question the validity of the idea that the functional structure of the clause is universal. While “exploded” functional structure may be well-motivated in some languages, it’s not at all clear that the facts of Yiddish word order support this type of analysis. I have not addressed the issue of whether this indicates that the inventory of functional features themselves (as opposed to the arrangement of the functional projections hosting such features) is or isn’t universal. One possibility is that all languages have the same functional features (such as Tense and Agreement), but the syntactic expression of these features is parametrized - they may project separate heads in some languages, and “fused” heads in others (see Thráinsson 1996 for a proposal along these lines regarding the structure of IP). Another possibility for typological variation is that languages differ in what kinds of features motivate movement at all, whether it is inflectional features (as in Chomsky’s 1995 system), or some set of more discourse-oriented features (as proposed by Abraham 1997). An interesting hybrid view is Lambova’s (2001) proposal that the typological property of being discourse-oriented is the factor determining that the CP domain takes a fused form (see also Uriagereka 1995), rather than the split projections argued for by Rizzi (1997). At the very least, Yiddish provides evidence for variation of the first kind, but it is also clear that discourse-functional properties play a role in Yiddish word order, not only in XP-fronting, but also in scrambling. Exactly how these properties exercise their influence on clause structure I will leave as a matter for future research.
References


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