Word Order in Yiddish Narrative Discourse
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0. Abstract
Based on data of spoken narrative discourse in Yiddish this paper analyses two structures common in Yiddish narrations: The placement of the finite verb in the first position of a declarative sentence and topicalization.

Like German Yiddish word order is centered around a strict verb-second rule. However, both Yiddish and spoken German show configurations of word order that go against the rule.

From a functional-pragmatic point of view these structures can’t be considered simply as deviations from so called unmarked word order. Rather they serve special purposes in the interaction between speaker and listener, sometimes in special discourse types, as the following paper tries to show.

Finally, differences and similarities in word order between Yiddish and German enable us to comment on the relationship between the two closely related languages.

1. Introduction
1.1. Yiddish word order
The main rule in Yiddish word order concerns the placement of the finite verb. The basic rule of Yiddish word order in declarative sentences is the placing of the finite verb at the second position in sentences as well as in subordinate clauses.
I: Er **gejt** arajn in hojs.
    He enters the house.

II: Er **zogt** der mamen az er **gejt** arajn in hojs.
    He tells his mother that he enters the house.

Weinreich (1971:330) gives an overview over the possible placements of sentence units in declarative sentences:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-unit</th>
<th>First fixed</th>
<th>Second fixed</th>
<th>Any or all of the following</th>
<th>Third fixed</th>
<th>Any or all of the following</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>words</td>
<td>place</td>
<td>place</td>
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<td>place</td>
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<tr>
<td>un</td>
<td>any unit</td>
<td>The inflected verb</td>
<td>Subject pronoun, indirect object pronoun, direct object pronoun, adverbs,</td>
<td>inflected part of the verb</td>
<td>Other infinitives, the Object nouns and phrases, Predicative nouns or adjectives, Adverbial phrases, Adverbial clauses</td>
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<td>ober</td>
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<td>oder</td>
<td>the inflected verb</td>
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<td>Subject pronoun, indirect object pronoun, direct object pronoun, adverbs,</td>
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<tr>
<td>etc.</td>
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In written as well as in spoken Yiddish, especially in narrative discourse, however, a construction is very common that places the finite verb in initial position of the sentence (V1 construction).¹

III: Chava G.:

(1) Di grupe stejt far im.
    The group is standing in front of him.

(2) **Zugt** er:”Ver fen ax iz a jid?”
    He says: “Who of you is Jewish?”

¹ The Yiddish data from example III onward are taken from Reershemius (1997)
(3) Hom zex ifgehojb etlexe hent.
A couple of hands were held up.

(4) Hot er mit zi geret jidis.
(So) he spoke Yiddish to them.

(5) Zugt der komandant:”Zejste, x hob de gezugt.”
The commander says: “You see, I have told you.”

Weinreich calls this construction “consecutive word order” (Weinreich 1971\textsuperscript{5}:331). The finite verb in first position carries according to Weinreich the meaning of “so” or “therefore”. It usually introduces the second or third part of a sequence of utterances.

Weinreich distinguishes between so called “marked” and “unmarked” word order in Yiddish declarative sentences. In “unmarked” word order the finite verb is to be found in the second position (Scheme 1). So called “consecutive word order” is therefore “unmarked”, a deviation from the rule.

1.2. The V1 construction

An analysis of Yiddish data shows that the finite verb in initial position is a very common construction, especially in narrative discourse. The V1-construction introduces the beginning of sequences of utterances as well as the second or third part. It is therefore unsatisfactory to describe the construction simply as a “marked” form or as a deviation from the rule.

A number of Yiddish grammarians and linguists mention the construction, though most of them only briefly:\textsuperscript{2} Gerzon (1902:58) describes the V1-construction as an unusual variant of word order to be found mainly in story-telling.

Katz (1987), Mark (1978) and Weissberg (1988) claim that the finite verb in initial position is a device of style: According to Katz (1987:236) it is used to avoid monotony. But he also mentions that "such inversion often has the additional force of "so", "then" or "and" in a continuous text. ... In many traditional styles of discourse and narrative only the first sentence in any paragraph is in basic word order. The rest may be processed by stilistic inversion.” Weissberg (1988:154) argues “Die Anfangsstellung des Verbes kann auf einen inneren Widerspruch,

\textsuperscript{2} Some recent publications concerning Yiddish word order are interested in the typological classification of Yiddish among westgermanic languages, i.e. the question whether it is a VO- or rather OV-language. (den Besten & Moed van Walraven 1985, Weermann 1986, Geilfuß 1991, Santorini 1993)
Zerissenheit hindeuten.” Mark (1978:378) agrees that the V1-construction can be found mainly in oral narrations. According to Mark it gives the text a special, more emotional tone. Furthermore, the construction can replace a conditional sentence when it fits better into the rhythm of spoken language. He gives the example “Vel ix im zen, vel ix im zogn” (If I see him, I’ll tell him). He calls the construction an elliptic sentence where the conjunction has been left out, but notes: “When the finite verb in a narration appears in first position of a sentence it seems to be more like a continuation than a beginning.”

Waletzky (1980:265) bases his observations on Weinreich and claims that the construction can only be analysed in a certain context. “The inversion is a signal that the sense of the sentence follows from the sense of the preceding sentence.”

Waletzky thus emphasises that the construction is fitted into the context of discourse in a special way. He, however, does not explain in which way.

Hall (1979) also views verb - subject order in the context of discourse phenomena: “... in a continuous narrative, sentences which maintain the same topic and which do not contain a leftward focused element must be verb initial.” Hall (1979:275). She distinguishes between “‘major’ sentences, completely understandable in themselves, and ‘minor’ sentences, understandable only within some context, so too he [the speaker of Yiddish.G.R.] can distinguish, intuitively, between sequences of sentences which hang together and form a discourse unit, what I shall call here term a Narrative Sequence, and those, which do not.” (Ibid.). In spoken language, however, the existence of so called ‘major sentences’ must be doubted: No sentences in actual spoken or written language exists without context. The context can be linguistic or non-linguistic. Hall’s example “A yid iz amol gekumen bazuxn zaynr axvr in Pariz” (A Jew once came to visit a friend of his in Paris) is only understandable as the beginning of a story, as an introduction formula of a narrative. Hall argues that the V1-construction can only be analysed in complete narrative sequences, but this should be the case with every syntactic phenomenon.

Prince (1988) takes us one step further in her description of the V1-construction: The position in front of the finite verb is empty and represents the context. She argues that the construction has not only a consecutive / resultative quality but functions also as a connecting technique in discourse.

Drawing on the results of Prince (1988), Miner (1990) analyses the V1-construction with the subject in the “Middle Field” and in the ”Final Field”. He

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3 See also Birnbaum (1979)
4 Mark (1978), 378 (translated from Yiddish)
argues that both cases represent different techniques of connecting the V1-construction with previously mentioned discourse knowledge: “...a V/I clause is always tied to its immediately preceding discourse unit (usually sentence or quotation), most often via middle subjects.” Miner (1990:126).

To summarize the different views of Yiddish grammarians and linguists:
- The V1-construction is mostly to be found in narrative discourse.
- It has a consecutive quality.
- It has a special connection to the previously verbalised context.

1.3. Data and methodology: Functional Pragmatics

This paper is analyzing the V1-construction in spoken Yiddish from a functional-pragmatic point of view (Rehbein 1988). Linguistic structures are analysed according to their function in the interaction between speaker and listener. The assumption is that communication influences linguistic structures as well as vice versa. Different discourse types use different ways of organizing the process of mediating knowledge between speaker and listener. We consider the V1-construction one of these linguistic devices in narrative discourse. To analyse the construction we don’t use the model of “marked” and “unmarked” word order but a scheme of word order that explains the communicative function of the distribution of knowledge in utterances and discourse context (Scheme 2).

Interaction is based on coherence: The listener is only capable of processing unknown knowledge (rhematic elements) which can be build up upon known knowledge, presuppositions or general knowledge (thematic elements). A speaker has several possibilities to mark knowledge on the utterance or the discourse level as thematic or rhematic, one of them is word order. Theme and rheme elements can be distributed over the whole utterance and they can be interlaced.

The terms “theme” and “rhem” were introduced by the Prague School of Linguistics to mark sentence units according to their communicative function (Mathesius 1929). Functional pragmatics modifies some of the well known definitions of theme and rheme: Theme cannot automatically be identified with the category “subject” and isn’t always placed at the head of the sentence. Theme is an known element of knowledge, on which an unknown element can be built up. Theme may be known from the discourse, from presuppositions or from general knowledge which speaker and listener share. The opposition between given and
new as a definition is dismissed since it excludes presuppositions and general knowledge (Eroms 1986).

The following functional position scheme for Yiddish word order was developed analogue to the schemes of Drach (1937) and Rehbein (1992) for German word order. It has to be distinguished between descriptive or normative schemes of word order for certain languages and topological schemes of functional positions. Descriptive or normative schemes like Scheme 1 list possible sequences of sentence units that are grammatically acceptable from a normative point of view. Topological schemes of functional positions don’t focus on the sentence units but on the positions themselves and their meaning for the organization of knowledge in a certain language. For the topological scheme of functional positions Yiddish and German word order differ only in a few but significant points. Yiddish and German both have verbal brackets, but in Yiddish they are less used than in German where they are compulsory. Because of the lesser frequency of bracket constructions in Yiddish the position between the infinite part of the verb and the sentence frame, the **Final Field**, has more emphasis in Yiddish than in German. In a German declarative sentence the Final Field is the place for supplements, subordinate clauses or tag questions. In a Yiddish declarative sentence these elements occupy a second Final Field.

Schema 2: Positions of the Yiddish declarative sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame of the sentence</th>
<th>Initial Field</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Middle Field</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Final Field</th>
<th>Frame of the sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV: Natan K.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Azoj</td>
<td>flejk</td>
<td>- kimen</td>
<td>tsu uns a ukrainiñer holtshaker tsu hakn holts</td>
<td>- jó?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(So a Ukrainian woodcutter used to come to cut wood, right?)

5 For differences between Yiddish and German word order from a normative point of view see for example Birnbaum (1918), 57-68. One of the most obvious differences is the placing of the finite verb at the end of the sentence in German subordinate clauses, whereas in Yiddish the finite verb remains in second position in subordinate clauses as well as in sentences.
This paper analyses the V1-construction in spoken Yiddish based on data recorded in Israel in 1989 (Reershemius 1997). The speakers were asked to tell parts of their biography. The result was a corpus of ten longer biographical narrations. Narrations have to be distinguished from story-telling (Ehlich 1983). Story-telling means to establish a fictional mental space for the listener where he can have the impression that the told events actually take place. Story-telling can be part of a narration, but narrations also include reconstructive discourse types like reports, descriptions, announcements, accounts or portraits. (Rehbein 1989).

2. Consecutiveness? The pragmatic function of the first position in Yiddish declarative sentences

As mentioned by several Yiddish grammarians the V1 construction has a certain consecutive quality. In the following we shall try to explain this quality from a functiona-pragmatic point of view discussing data of narrations in spoken Yiddish. The speaker of example V was born and raised in an Ukrainian shtetl as a Yiddish-Russian bilingual.

V: Natan K.
(1) Ba di ortodoksiֲ¬ jidn in gants Mizrax-Ejropֲ¬ ee flegt men ֳ¢teln
    Among orthodox Jews all over eastern Europe one used to put a
    a xupֲ¨ in dermit hot men zix bagnugֲ¬nt.
    wedding canopy, and that was sufficient.
(2) Ober dֲ’ administratsijֲ‐, dֲ’ est ֳ‘rajxiֲ¬ baj ins t farlangt eem tsֲ’
    But the Austrian administration required
    gejbn / tsֲ’ gejbn dֲ’ / dֲ’ / dֲ’ / dֲ’ / der miֲ¬poxֲ´ a gezetslexֲ´ form
    a legal frame for the family.
(3) Hot men farlangt ojx a tsivilֲ’ xasenֲ’.
    So they also required a civil marriage.

In this example the speaker is trying to explain why he has his mother's family name, rather than his father's. He points out that Jews in Eastern Europe did not usually marry according to state law, but that the Austrian administration tried to force them to do so. In the third utterance in this example, initiated by the finite verb, the speaker expresses a consequence, resulting from the information presented in the previous utterances: The Austrian administration wanted the
Jewish families to be registered as the non-Jewish families and therefore marriage according to national law was demanded.

The speaker of the following example VI is a Yiddish-Russian bilingual from Lithuania.

VI: Avram D.

1. Dorx Ponive¥ hobn g´num´n d´n fufts´ntn (   ) / hobn g´num´n
   On the fifteenth, tanks and cars with soldiers .
   gejn tankim mit vogn mit militer mit / mit / mit …
   began to go through Ponivjesh.
2. (S hot g´ton) gants´n´ next.
   It went on for whole nights.
3. Hobn mir far¥tan´n, a s i di krik.
   So we understood, that this was war.

The second example deals with the begin of World War II, which the speaker and his family witnessed in the Lithuanian town Ponivjesch. In the first utterance the speaker describes how the army passed through Ponivjesch on its way to the border. As a consequence of this, he and his wife understood, that war was about to break out. The second utterance in this example acquires its resultative character through the construction with the finite verb in its first position.

Obviously, deviation from so called “unmarked” word order in the two examples does not emphasize the utterances, as some Yiddish grammarians claim. Rather, it has the distinct function to mark the utterances as consequences of the preceding context. How can this function be explained? To answer this question we have to examine the first position in Yiddish utterances, the Initial Field, the position preceding the finite verb.

The speaker of example VII was raised as a Yiddish monolingual in Warsaw.

VII: Meir V.

1. Ix bin g´vejzn a ¥ist´, x hob faroxtn d´ ¥iox, g´maxt naj´ ¥iox.
   I was a shoemaker, I mended shoes, made new shoes.
2. Bin ix g´zitsn ba d´ arb´t in / in k´sajd´ g´pign mit blit.
   I sat workin, and I was spitting blood as usual.
3. Ob´ ix hob g´dorfn glaxtsaatik di kind´ badin´n.
   But at the same time I had to look after the children.
4. X hob g´mist fa z´ fadin´n af / zol zan af brojt mit ep´s tsi.
   I had to earn something for them to / so they should have bread with something else.
The speaker recalls that his wife was sentenced to jail for five years, because she was an active member of the Polish communist party. He himself had to take care of their two children.

If we now look at the position preceding the finite verb, we see that the speaker starts most of his utterances with "Ix". He is talking about himself, about his difficult situation. In the beginning of every single utterance he signalizes to the listener that he is going on to talk about himself. Utterance 9 starts with "In Var¥e": From the context of the narration the listener already knows that the story is taking place in Warsaw. The speaker signalizes now that he is going to pass to another aspect of the narrative. He invites the listener to reactivate those elements of discourse-knowledge concerning Warsaw already presented by the speaker. In utterance 10 the speaker corrects himself, for he realizes that he forgot to give an element of information which might be important for the proceeding narrative. He starts with "Jo, de fro". The listener already knows about the speaker's wife from the context. He is led by the speaker to reactivate this knowledge.

The position in front of the finite verb gives the listener an orientation:. The speaker signalizes which part of the established knowledge he should reactivate in order to follow the proceeding discourse. Word order organizes the listener's discourse-knowledge. The positions in an utterance, which can be occupied by sentence constituents, have special functions in arranging information for the sake of the listener.

The position in front of the finite verb is often occupied by a theme element. Speaker and listener share this (grammatical) knowledge about the structure of the utterance and they can use this experience even in acting against the custom.
It must be specified that we are talking about the sentence mode of declarative sentences and not about questions and imperatives, where the finite verb also occurs in initial position. Sentence mode is the way in which the listener is addressed: In questions he is instructed to fill in an information gap by supplying verbal discourse knowledge. In imperatives he is confronted with information, which he is asked to transform into action. In a declarative sentence he receives information which he is instructed to accept and to process.

In a declarative sentence beginning with the finite verb, the position supplying orientation is not occupied. This functions as a signal to the listener to base the new utterance on the entire information given in the context, that is to fill in the empty position mentally with the knowledge he possesses from the preceding discourse. The utterance beginning with the finite verb is linked in a closer way to the context than an utterance with an occupied pre-verb position. Therefore the construction cannot be considered as an ellipsis, which could be completed, for instance, with an adverb. It is a special technique of chaining utterances, which is very common in spoken Yiddish, especially in narrative discourse. Thus far our results confirm Prince (1988). The following example VIII, however, shows that the technique can have other effects than making an utterance to be the consequence of the preceding context. The speaker is the same as in example VII:

VIII: Meir V.

1. Iz zi, di fro, vus i g’vejn ba mi’, zi iz g’vejzn a fro fin a
   Well, she, the woman who had been at my place, she was the wife of a
   mitglit f’n tsentraln komitet f’n Bunt in z´ hot g´arb’t in
   member of the central committee of the “Bund” and she worked in the sanatory
   sanatorj´ ba d´ umfir´s / ba d´ umfir ¥aft..
   with the managers, with the management.

2. Kint z´ tsi ts´ mi´, zugt z´: ”Vus zent ir ep´s ajoj trorik?”
   She comes to me and says:”Why are you so sad?”

3. Dertsajl ’x, zug ’x, x darf ahajnmem´n d´ kind´r f´n / f´n gan
   I tell, I say, I must take home the children from Paradise
   ajdn in g´hen´m araan.
   back into hell.

4. Traxt z´, traxt z´.
   She thinks, she thinks.

5. Zugt z´: ”Vu¥’ i´ volt / i´ volt g´volt, z´ zoln du blabn nox a
   She says:”Would you like them to stay for another
   monat?”
   a month?”

6. Zug ’x: ”Ix bin gu´ ni¥ ajoj drajst, afil´ tsu traxtn vejgn dejm.”
I say: “I’m not that bold even to think about it”

The speaker recalls how a woman, a member of the "Bund" organizes for his two sick children to stay for another month in a sanatorium. In the first utterance the listener is orientated back to the woman by the anapher "zi", but the speaker realizes, that it might be difficult for the listener to reactivate the information he should have about the woman, for she was only mentioned much earlier in the narrative. He adds the relative clause "vos i gevejn ba mir", so that the listener knows, to which element of the given information he must relate the anapher "zi". The following utterances start with the finite verb - this means that the position in front of the finite verb remains empty. The listener is instructed to supplement knowledge given in the preceding discourse into the vacant positions. The utterances are linked very closely, so that the entire narrative receives a fast rhythm which reproduces the original dialogue-situation, the quick sequences of action, question and answer, as it must have taken place in reality. The longer period of thinking in utterance 4 is expressed by the same technique, but by repeating the words "traxt ze", it is marked as the opposite of quick action.

To get this kind of "iconic" effect, the listener mentally has to carry out the orientation procedure on his own. There isn’t the effect of consecutiveness here, which is restricted to the use of the construction in retrospective narrative.

In utterances in which the finite verb occupies the second position, i.e. sentences with so called “unmarked” word order, the position preceding the finite verb gives an orientation by picking up established discourse knowledge and verbalizing it again. When the speaker chooses not to make use of this position he calls upon the listener to supplement discourse knowledge mentally, i.e. in an nonverbal manner.

Such a procedure can only be carried out when the speaker is certain that the relevant discourse knowledge is derivable from the immediate context. It is this feature of the construction, which renders its consecutive character.

This is the reason why the V1 construction is mainly to be found in narrations: Compared to conversations for example narrations have stable settings: When somebody tells a story, gives an account etc. the roles of speaker and listener are fixed for a certain amount of time. The speaker can build up a narrative background, he overviews the knowledge he has given to the listener and can lead the listener back to it by using the V1 construction.

3. Topicalization
Based on the results of 4 we would like to add some remarks to the technique of topicalization, the placing of sentence units in the Initial Field, that are not supposed to be there according to “unmarked” word order. Lowenstamm (1977) and Waletzky (1980) analyse topicalization in Yiddish declarative sentences as a process of movements on the sentence level. Prince (1988) coined the term “Yiddish-movement” for a technique of topicalization in English used by English-Yiddish bilinguals or by speakers of English with some background in Yiddish. Topicalization (TOP) as well as Yiddish-movement (YM) is involved in “the marking of old/new information: TOP picks up on some evoked or set-inferrable entity that figures in an open sentence represent given/salient information and closes that open sentence with some new information.” Prince (1988:260-61). Compared to TOP Yiddish-movement is less constrained.

From a functional-pragmatic point of view we claim that in Yiddish topicalization is a technique where the position in front of the finite verb, the orientation position, is occupied by rhematic elements of knowledge. As mentioned above the position is usually occupied by thematic elements, by established discourse knowledge or by elements easily accessible to the listener from the actual hic-et-nunc of interaction. Rhematic elements in a Yiddish declarative sentence prefer the Final Field, as the following example IX shows.

The speaker of example IX is the same as in VII and VIII.

IX. Meir V

(1) Aroskim´n kim ix fin a ur´m´ familj´.
   I come from a poor family.

(2) D´ tat´ g´vejn an arb´t´, d´ mam´ hot z´x g´por´t in stib, un
   Father was a worker, mother was busy at home, and
   al´s arb´t´ hot er zajr ¥ / zajr knap fadint.
   as a worker he didn’t earn a lot.

(3) Kinder iz g´vejzn a sax un s i g´vejzn svej´ tsum lejbn.
   There were a lot of children and it was difficult to survive.

The speaker recalls his background from a poor working-class family in Poland. His father didn’t earn a lot and his parents had a number of children to take care of.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame of the sentence</th>
<th>Initial Verb fin.</th>
<th>Middle-Verb field infin.</th>
<th>Final Frame of the sentence</th>
<th>2.Final Field sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kinder iz</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>gevejzn</td>
<td>a sax</td>
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</table>
“A sax kinder”, a lot of children, is that part of knowledge that has to be established in utterance 3. “Kinder” is placed in front of the finite verb, because the context - description of a family - suggests the mentioning of children. The second part, the rhematic knowledge, is placed at the preferred position for new discourse knowledge in Yiddish, the Final Field.

Compared to IX example X is a case of topicalization:
The speaker is the same as in VI.

X. Avram D.

(1) Al’ytet hobn g’brent.
All towns were burning.

(2) Hob ix ong’trofn a menY mit a mejd’l.’
I met a man with a little girl.

(3) Un er hot g’zen, ix hob ojzg’zen punkt vi meYug’.
And he saw that I looked exactly like a madman.

(4) Absolut meYug’, ix vejs nit, vos ts’ton.
Absolutely mad, I don’t know what to do.

(5) Af kerik ken ix nit gejn.
Backward I couldn’t go.

(6) Ahin ken ix nit gejn, ( ) zuxn di kinder, kejner vejs....
Forward I couldn’t go, (    ) to look for the children, anybody knows...

The speaker recalls how he lost in the first chaotic days of World War II the contact to his wife and his two children. He was trying to find them but had to give up because the Germans were about to invade the place. He didn’t know what to do: In utterance (5) and (6) he places the elements “af kerik” and “ahin” in the position in front of the finite verb:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame of the sentence</th>
<th>Initial Field</th>
<th>Verb fin.</th>
<th>Middle-Verb field</th>
<th>Final Field</th>
<th>2.Final Field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Af kerik</td>
<td>ken</td>
<td>ix nit</td>
<td>gejn</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahin</td>
<td>ken</td>
<td>ix nit</td>
<td>gejn</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The speaker mentions two actions he can’t take - to go back or to go ahead, rhematic elements on the utterance level. But from the preceding discourse the listener knows already, that the speaker was trapped between the Russian and the German armies. The rhematic element of the utterance is a thematic element on the level of discourse.

XI: Jehuda L.

(1) Ila Eren / Ila iz g’ven der komandant.
    Ila Eren / Ila was the commander.

(2) Un er hot glajx arojsg´rukt zajn kop un iz glajx der¥osn g´vorn.
    And he moved out his head and was shot immediately.

(3) In halz, a kojl in halz, un er iz glajx g´faln.
    Into the throat, a bullet into the throat, and he fell immediately.

(4) Mir hobn nox a bisl ge¥osn, ober mir hobn g´zen, a me tsint un /
    We continued shooting a bit, but we saw that they put fire/
    m´ vil unterminirn di hojz.
    they want to blow up the house.

(5) Un m´n hot uns g´zogt, mir zoln z´x tsurikern fun kamf.
    And we were told to stop fighting.

(6) Ila Žajnbojm hot er g´hejsn.
    Ila Shajnbojm was his name.

(7) Dos iz g´ven a komandir, vos hot g´rod´ g´velt kemfn in valt.
    That was a commander who especially wanted to fight in the woods.

The speaker fought in a group of partisans in the getto of Wilna. He starts in utterance (1) to tell what happened to his commander, but he only remembers his first name. He continues with a description of the fighting and restarts in utterance (6) with the full name of the commander. In utterance (6) he topicalizes: The rhematic element of the utterance, the name, is placed in front of the finite verb:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame of the sentence</th>
<th>Initial Field</th>
<th>Verb fin.</th>
<th>Middle-Verb field</th>
<th>Final Infin.</th>
<th>Frame of the Field</th>
<th>2.Final Field</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ila</td>
<td>hot</td>
<td>er</td>
<td>gehejsn</td>
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<td>Žajnbojm</td>
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In example XI again the rhematic element of the utterance, the name, is almost thematic knowledge on the discourse level: The listener has received already some information about the commander (1-3).
Topicalization in the analyzed example is a discourse technique that isn’t restricted to the utterance level. The position in front of the finite verb serves as an orientation position for the listener. This position occupied by a thematic element connects the utterance to the immediate discourse context. This position unoccupied induces the listener to carry out the orientating procedure on his own, that is to check the accessible discourse knowledge, the general knowledge shared by speaker and listener, the hic-et-nunc of the actual interaction and the rules of the actual discourse type for the knowledge needed to fill in the gap. In case of topicalization the orientation position is filled by an element, that appears to be rhematic on utterance level. On the discourse level it is, however, already accessible to the listener.

4. Comparison with word order in spoken German

The V1 construction can be observed in spoken German, although it is not as common as it is in Yiddish. Example XII is an excerpt of a narration told in the German variety of the Ruhr-area.:

XII: Flötz Dickebank

(1) Dann hat der versucht …
   Then he tried …
(2) Getz wußter, dat ich sonntags immer arbeiten mußte.
   Now he knew that I always had to work on Sundays.
(3) Hatta mir n Schein reingeschmissen, nech, war ja reklamiert:
   So he left me a note, right, I was claimed:
(4) "Panzerfaust-Schmeißen, heute (   ) Hausmannhof," nich?
   "Bazooka - chucking, today (   ) Hausmannshof," right?
(5) Und dann …
   And then …
(6) Unten drunter stand: "Der Zettel ist dem Betriebsführer vorzulegen," nich?
   Down underneath was written:"This sheet has to be presented to the factory-manager," right?
(7) Hab ich meim Betriebsführer den Zettel gelesen.
   So I read the sheet to my factory-manager.
(8) Der hat den Zettel genommen, nich?
   He took the sheet, right?

6 See also Auer (1993)
Zack, zack, (kaputtgerissen), "verdammter Goldfasan", sacht er, nich?
Zack, zack, he tore it up, "damned goldpheasant," he says, right?

The speaker, an 80 year old coal-miner, recalls the troubles he had during the war with a neighbor who was a Nazi.
The Nazi knew that the speaker had to work on Sundays, as the speaker mentions in utterance (2). To get him into trouble, the neighbor put him a notice into the letter-box, that the speaker has to join a kind of armed training. With the empty Initial Field, the orientation position, the speaker turns the utterance into a consequence of the preceding context by connecting it closer to the immediate discourse knowledge, the same technique as we observed in the Yiddish examples. In the utterances (6) and (7) the procedure is repeated.

In German V1 constructions in declarative sentences are restricted to spoken language, while in Yiddish it can be found in spoken as well as in written language.¶

Topicalization as described above for Yiddish is also a very common phenomenon in spoken German:

XIII: Classroom Discourse

Sp1
(1) Ja, und die Mehrheit, die haben nichts gemacht.
Yes, and the majority didn’t do anything
(2) Die haben daneben gestanden und “Bravo” geschrien.
They stood at the side and shouted “Bravo”.
(3) Also, ich finde schon, daß das n Pogrom war!
So I do think that it was a pogrom!

Sp2
(4) **Achtundreißig** hat ja auch nich das gesamte Volk mitgemacht.
The whole people didn’t participate in 38 either.
(5) Also, ich weiß nich, ob das n Kriterium wäre...
So, I don’t know whether that would be a criterion...

Pupils discuss an incident that happened in a nearby neighborhood in Hamburg where asylum seekers were attacked by right-winged youths. The question is whether to call the incident a “pogrom” comparable to the so called

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¶ Both Prince (1988) and Miner (1990) use data from written language, novels, to analyse the V1 construction

§ Examples XIII and XIV: Reershemius (1994)
“Reichskristallnacht” from 1938 or not. In (4) speaker 2 puts the rhematic element *achtunddreißig* in the orientation position in front of the finite verb to strengthen the point of speaker 1. In the context of the entire discourse *achtunddreißig* is a thematic element, because the “Reichskristallnacht” was mentioned before.

Both techniques, the V1 construction and topicalization, Yiddish has in common with spoken German. Even one of the main differences between Yiddish and German normative word order, the placing of the finite verb at the end of a subordinate sentence in German, starts to erode in spoken German:

**XIV: Classroom Discourse**

(1) Ich hab mir die Bewegungen und den Singsang immer damit

*I always tried to explain the movements and the humming that way*

erklärt, also, daß / daß die so besser memorieren können, *weil*

*that / that they help them to memorize, because*

die *müssen* ja so viel auswendig lernen.

*they have so much to learn by heart.*

In example XIV the teacher tries to explain why orthodox Jews in a film were humming and moving in a special way while praying. Although *weil* introduces a subordinate clause the finite verb *müssen* is in second position.

It is well known that Yiddish and German are closely related languages. But why are there similarities especially between Yiddish and *spoken* German?

Yiddish developed independently on the bases of spoken Old High German and Middle High German varieties. Both Yiddish and German existed for centuries in a situation of diglossia as spoken languages in contact with Hebrew resp. Latin as written languages. Yiddish, however, preserved this diglossic situation for almost 250 years longer than German. Whereas German developed by the end of the 16th century into a written standard language a Yiddish written standard emerged only by the end of the 19th century, although there has been written Yiddish since the late middle ages.

So Yiddish remained free of the constraints of a written standard much longer than German, and in Yiddish the dynamics of the germanic component could develop more freely as a spoken language than in German, which was handicapped by the restrictive written standard: For example in Yiddish synthetic morphology was given up in favour of analytic constructions - a phenomenon that can be observed in modern spoken German as well. In Yiddish, however, it became part of the later
standard. This is also the case with word order: German tends to go into the same direction as in modern Yiddish.

5. Conclusion

To conclude let us recall how the V1 construction is treated by Yiddish grammarians: It is characterized as a consecutive construction, typical of narrative discourse. We therefore examined excerpts of spoken narrative discourse.

Based on the premise that word order is a device to organize knowledge in the interaction between speaker and listener the position in front of the finite verb in Yiddish serves to orientate the listener. The position is usually occupied by a thematic element to guarantee continuity and coherence in discourse.

When the speaker decides to leave this position unoccupied the listener is asked to supplement discourse knowledge, general knowledge or presuppositions mentally. The missing (verbalized) element shortens the distance between the utterance and the immediate context, which leads to the impression of consecutiveness. Consecutiveness, however, is only one effect the construction might have as example 7 shows.

When the speaker decides to fill the position in front of the finite verb with rhematic knowledge, the effect is topicalization. The discussion of examples 8 to 10 show that rhematic knowledge on the sentence level is usually thematic on the discourse level, be it discourse knowledge, general knowledge or presuppositions.

A comparison with German shows that both, the V1 construction and topicalization are common in spoken German, too. A possible explanation for these similarities between Yiddish, spoken and written, and spoken German is the late standardization of Yiddish which allowed the germanic component to develop in this special way that was suppressed by a conservative standard language in German.
6. References


