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### **The vitality of Yiddish among Hasidic infants and toddlers in a low SES preschool in Brooklyn**

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**Abstract** *The first study of the acquisition of Yiddish by young children reported here was triggered by a) the growing awareness by the Early Childhood Center Yeled V'Yalda, Brooklyn, New York, of a need for a language assessment tool for the fast growing number of Yiddish-learning pre-schoolers to better serve them and b) the identification of demographic and linguistic factors that characterize the Hasidic Yiddish-speaking community that enabled us to investigate issues at the core of current theoretical debates in the fields of language acquisition and bilingualism and to address clinical and educational concerns. This project was made possible by the development of innovative research strategies adapted to this cultural and linguistic group. The findings that emerge from the data collection on 82 children between 14 and 38 months reveal that when Yiddish is the home-language it tends to be the dominant language in that it is used at least 75% of the time. The comparative analyses of the pattern of lexical and morphosyntactic development across different groups exposed to different percentages of Yiddish and English reveal: a) an effect of percentage of exposure on lexical development; b) differences between the use of decontextualized language in each language in the same bilinguals and c) a lack of effect of percentage of exposure on children exposed up to 50% Yiddish on the order of acquisition of different constructions and on the age at which they are acquired. Additionally the data on balanced bilinguals confirm previous findings on the effects of rich morphological paradigms on the order of acquisition of constructions in the two languages and sheds an interesting light on the relation between vocabulary and morphosyntactic development. The theoretical, clinical and educational implications of these findings are discussed. This study provides strong systematic empirical evidence for the vitality of Yiddish among Hasidic infants and toddlers enrolled in the pre-school center Yeled V'Yalda and demonstrates that the various demographic and linguistic contexts in which these children are raised enable us to address issues that are relevant to bilinguals acquiring different language combinations.*

#### **1. Introduction**

Nine criteria have been identified to measure the vitality (and hence the level of endangerment) of a language (Fishman, 1991, UNESCO, 2003). These include:

1. Intergenerational language transmission;
2. Availability of materials for language education and literacy;
3. Community members' attitudes towards their own language;
4. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, official status and use;
5. Shifts in domains of language use;
6. Response to new domain and media;
7. Type and quality of documentation;
8. Absolute number of speakers;
9. Proportion of speakers within the total population.

The aims of this chapter are two fold. First it is to empirically evaluate the scope of the intergenerational transmission of Yiddish in the Hasidic population in Brooklyn (criterion 1 above) (see Isaacs, 1999, 2004 and Katz, 2006 on the need for such a contribution) and to address several other criteria listed above with respect to the vitality of Yiddish. Secondly, it also demonstrates that the exceptionally varied demographic and linguistic environments in which Hasidic Yiddish-speaking children are raised provide an ideal research context in which to address psycholinguistic issues that are central to current theories and that have profound and broad educational and clinical implications.

#### **2. Context of this study**

According to the US 2000 census, 178,945 speakers of Yiddish reside in the United States. They constitute 0.06 % of the US population and 0.38% of US residents who speak a language other than English. The majority (63%) are concentrated in the New York State area. In Brooklyn, according to the New York City Department of City Planning (2004) report, two areas have recently undergone tremendous increases in the number of Yiddish speakers: (i) 22, 407 Yiddish speakers over 5 years of age resided in Brooklyn Community District 1 (that includes

Williamsburg) in 2000, that is the result of a 34.1% increase in number of speakers between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 they constituted 17.1% of the population of their district and in 2000 21.1%. In this district more than half (55.3%) the speakers of all minority languages reported their lack of proficiency in English. In 2000 28.5% of the district residents spoke English only and the next largest linguistic group is made up of speakers of Spanish and Spanish Creoles, followed by speakers of Yiddish (21.3%), Polish (16.7%) and Chinese (2.9%).

(ii) 32, 889 Yiddish speakers over 5 years of age resided in Brooklyn Community District 12 (that includes Borough Park) in 2000, that is the result of a 30% increase in number of speakers between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 they constituted 28.2% of the population of their district and in 2000 27.9%. Half of the users (49.2%) of all minority languages reported they do not speak English very well. In 2000, 38.8% of the residents spoke English only and the largest linguistic minority is the Yiddish-speaking community (27.9%) followed by speakers of Spanish/Spanish Creole (17.7%), Chinese (12.4%) and Russian (11.5%).

These figures demonstrate that a) the number of Yiddish speakers is increasing in these two districts and b) the Yiddish-speaking community constitutes a substantial proportion of the residents of these two districts- two factors that facilitate the vitality of a language according to the Fishman (1991) and UNESCO (2003) criteria listed above. The examinations of the linguistic breakdowns pertaining to other districts demonstrates that this change is not the result of leaving other Brooklyn or New York districts or US states (US census 2000). Nor is it the outcome of immigration trends outlined in Fix & Passel (2003). Instead the high birth rate of the Yiddish-speaking community best accounts for these demographic changes that triggered the need for a range of health and educational services addressing the needs of Yiddish-speaking children.

Yeled V'Yalda Early Childhood Center (henceforth YVY) was originally founded 28 years ago to serve the Hasidic communities of Brooklyn. It first served 80 children in Williamsburg. Since then it has grown and now provides services to more than 2,000 (0 to year 5 year old) children in education programs, 3,500 (between 6 months and 21 years of age) in clinical services (including speech and language pathology, physical and educational therapy) and 4,000 in the nutrition programs. YVY locations are spread across Staten Island and Brooklyn. In Brooklyn, four sites are located in Williamsburg and ten in Borough Park (see figure 1 below). YVY serves low income populations and is funded by a range of federal sources, New York State and New York City and private funds. YVY's distinctive features include: a) the exceptionally high number of children- it is one of the two largest Head Start in New York City, b) the very high proportion (almost 70%) of children whose home language is not English compared to the proportion of 30% at a national level that will be reached by 2015 (Fix & Passel, 2005); c) the exceptionally broad range of ethnic, cultural and linguistic communities- more than 15 languages are used by YVY children in addition to English and Yiddish and they include Arabic, Farsi, Haitian Creole, Hebrew, Spanish and Russian and d) the comprehensiveness of the education and health services it provides. Indeed its mission is to provide low SES boys (*yeled*) and girls (*yalda*) with a professional preschool education focusing on the whole child and the family (see figure 2).

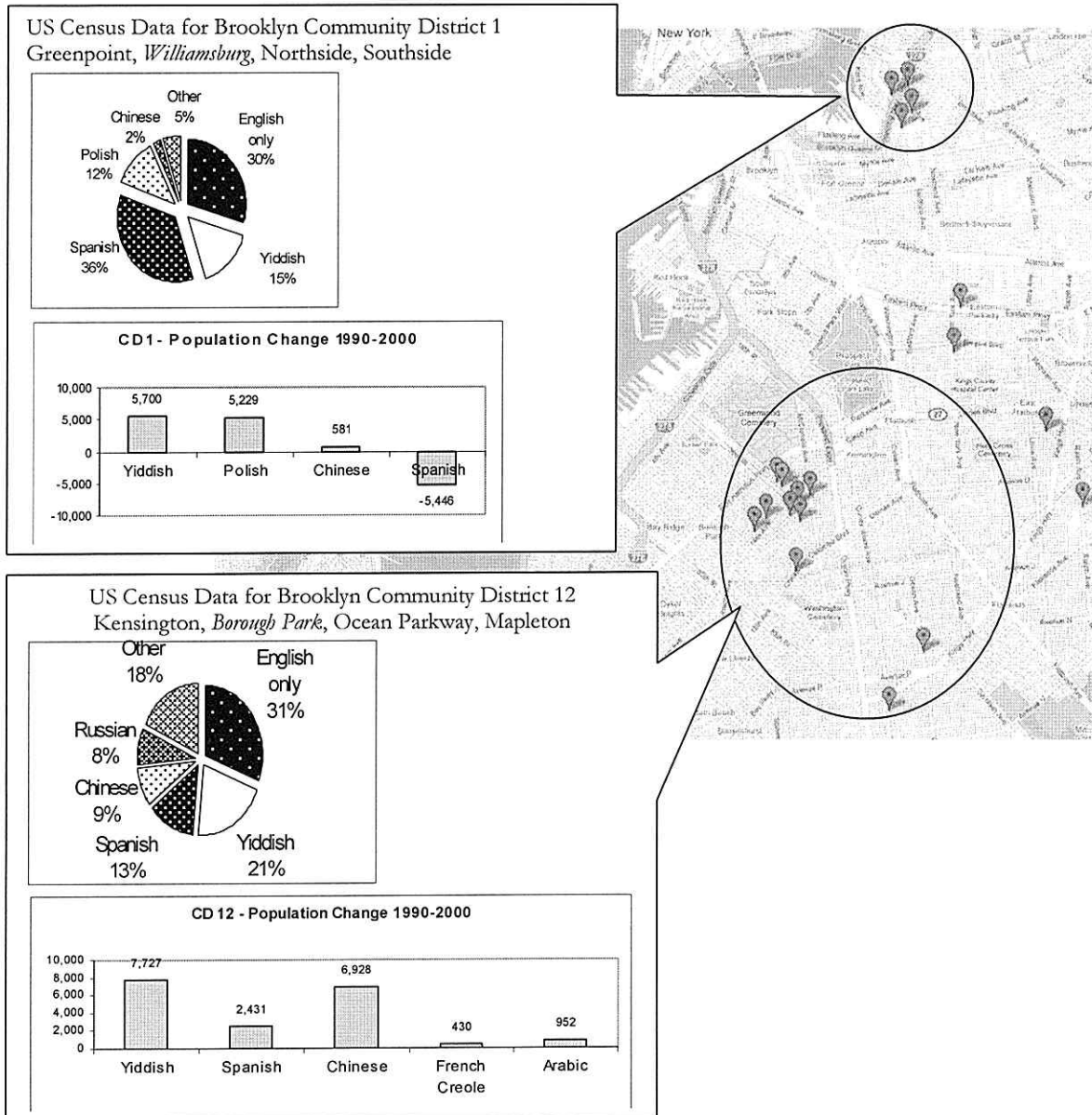
While it now provides services to an exceptionally broad cross-section of diverse cultural and ethnic groups, the Yiddish-speaking Hasidic children still represent a substantial proportion of its population: out of 2,257 children enrolled in education programs (between 0 and 5), 1,218 (that is 53.9%) have Yiddish as a Home Language according to YVY central enrolment database. Across all education programs at YVY, more than 20% of the children qualify for an Individualized Education Plan that enables YVY Special Education services to address the learning needs of these children who exhibit delayed or impaired development. Given the number of Yiddish-speaking children who exhibit typical and atypical development served by Yeled V'Yalda, it is not surprising that professionals working there have expressed the needs for language assessments tools adapted to Yiddish-speaking children.

### 3. Conducting the first study<sup>1</sup> on the acquisition of Yiddish by Hasidic children

#### 3.1 Challenges

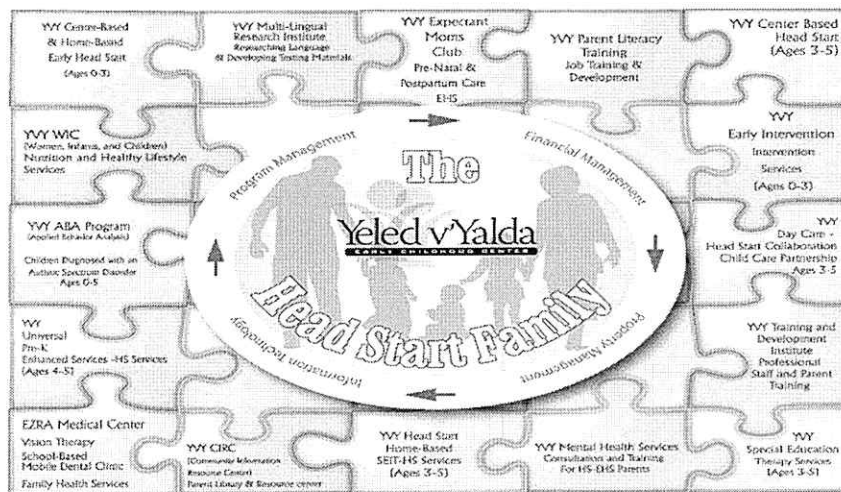
At least three obstacles had prevented the study of the acquisition of Yiddish by Hasidic children. First Yiddish is not viewed as a legitimate object of study by Yiddish-speaking Hasidim- in that it distracts from religious studies. Yiddish is assigned such a high cultural value that it cannot be compared with other languages (Isaacs, 1999, 2004). Secondly Hasidic communities value the religious education of men over their secular knowledge. Women are encouraged more than men to pursue a slightly higher level of secular

Figure 1: Yeled V'Yalda locations (indicated with markers) and US census figures for Brooklyn Community Districts 1 & 12



vocational education. However traditionally college studies are eschewed. This varies across individuals and religious groups and may be currently changing. For instance, YVY has been at the forefront of the professionalization of members of this community by recruiting teachers and therapist with high credentials (the majority of YVY teachers have master degrees) and fostering further professional development. Still education and training tend to focus on vocational professional courses at colleges that accommodate religious needs. In consequence very few members of the communities acquire the research training required to study Yiddish and/or develop language assessment tools for their community. In addition, linguistic descriptions and analyses of

Figure 2: Range of services provided by Yeled V'Yalda Early Childhood Center



Yiddish have neglected the varieties spoken by Hasidim (see review of Jacobs, 2005 by Katz, 2006). According to Katz (2004) “*The time has come for modern Yiddish studies to make the study of Hasidic Yiddish language a primary focus of researchers*” (p380). Finally it is not always easy for outsiders to become observers of these communities (Isaacs, 1999, 2004).

These obstacles were overcome by a number of factors. The programs run by YVY comply with the policies of the organizations that fund them. While Head Start policies have always emphasized the whole development of the child, more recently they have become more concerned with the acquisition of language and pre-literacy skills in preschool. This focus in turn has had an impact on the realization of the specific needs of children whose home- language is not English at a national level (e.g. IRA & NIH, 2007). The professionals at YVY that serve almost 70% of English Language Learners have also become aware of these needs. For instance all Head Start children have to undergo developmental screenings within 45 days following their enrolment that constitute the first step towards a full evaluation if any developmental problems are identified. These screenings include the assessment of language skills. Currently these assessments are available in English and in Spanish but not in the many other languages spoken by pre-school children in the US, including Yiddish. Secondly two reports that relied on questionnaire and interview data included among their participants speech and language pathologists who work at YVY and documented the needs for better assessment tools for Yiddish (Frenkel, 2000, Lubinsky, Zeller & Sontag, 2006). YVY is a dynamic organization with strong leadership that responded to these educational and clinical needs of the Yiddish-speaking populations by appointing a developmental psycholinguist specialized in cross-linguistic studies (i.e. the author) as director of policy for research and education and by creating a research institute.

At the time of her appointment at YVY the developmental psycholinguist (i.e. the author) was teaching in a department of Speech and Language pathology that trains a few of the Yiddish-speaking therapists working at YVY. In this context she was already supervising a masters students project that aimed at developing a Yiddish language screening tool for infants and toddlers. Her appointment at YVY extended the potential of this project and facilitated the development of innovative research strategies and data collection procedures adapted to the participating population that are described below.

### 3.2. Developing appropriate research strategies

#### 3.2.1 Methodological procedure

The decision to adapt the Mac Arthur Communicative Development Inventory (henceforth MBCDI) (Fenson, 1993 et al.) was motivated by several factors:

- (i) By the time this project was started the MBCDI had been adapted successfully to 38 languages that exhibit different typological features and that are tied to different cultures;

- (ii) Studies conducted on the original American English MBDCI and a few other adaptations to other languages have demonstrated its reliability, validity and predictive value- hence its usefulness for clinicians evaluating infants and toddlers (e.g. Jackson-Maldonado et al., 2003);
- (iii) The MBDCI and other types of inventories tapping the lexical and morphosyntactic abilities of children have been shown to exhibit reliability not only for monolinguals (e.g. Reese & Read, 2000) but also for bilingual children (Patterson, 1998, Rescorla & Achenbach, 2002, De Houwer & Bornstein, 2007);
- (iv) It is a non-invasive methodology: parents are asked to complete a questionnaire that taps the language skills of their children. Therefore it is adapted to a population that is not used to outside observers;
- (v) In a relatively short time it is possible to collect data on a substantial number of participants, a strategy that was important for this project for different reasons explained below.

Lessons learned from the adaptations of other MBDCI were taken into account. For instance, there has been three MBDCI adaptations to Spanish for users of Cuban, Mexican and European Spanish varieties. According to Proctor (2006), the use of these distinct adaptations is problematic in the United States where a) children may be raised hearing different varieties of Spanish and b) varieties that may be distant from each other in the geographical areas the speakers come from are likely to come into contact and influence each other especially in densely populated urban areas (e.g. Otheguy, Zentella & Livert, 2007).

From a research perspective, a number of issues both complicated this study and made it theoretically relevant for the field of bilingual development. Only anecdotal evidence was available regarding the demographic and linguistic contexts in which Yiddish-learning infants and toddlers are raised. This is why in addition to the Yiddish adaptation of the MBDCI, a detailed background questionnaire was adapted from the one developed by Jackson-Maldonado et al. (2003) in collaboration with professionals at YVY who are themselves members of the Yiddish-speaking Hasidic community (reproduced in table 1 below). The rationale behind each question is explained below.

1.b Many studies on the development of early cognitive abilities, including language have reported differences between girls and boys. There is currently a debate in the field on whether gender factors are sometimes overridden by effects of birth order/sibling position.

2.a and 2 b Models of development make claims about milestones in relation to chronological age and it is typically on this basis (i.e. delayed development) that clinical cases are first identified.

3a, 3b, 3c and 8 Three studies have considered the effects of birth order on monolingual development. Children are less supportive conversational partners than mothers. So while mothers' language input to their first born children is not affected by such skills input to later born children is affected (Hoff-Ginsberg & Krueger, 1991). The characteristics of the language input of American-English speaking mothers to their first born have been found to positively contribute to their morphosyntactic development (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1998). Allen (1996) observed that Inuktitut-speaking children with fewer siblings were acquiring morphosyntax faster. She suggested that the language input of older siblings close in age may provide an immature language model that delays morphosyntactic development. However Allen (1996) was not able to systematically test her hypothesis given the small number of participants in her study. To date these specific effects of birth order effects have been examined on monolingual development and in families with a maximum of four siblings but there is no reason why they should not apply to bilingual development and/or larger families. Studies on birth order effects in bilingual development have reported that 1<sup>st</sup> born tend to become more proficient speakers of the home/minority language than later born who are exposed to their first born speaking the majority/school language. Given the large number of siblings of most participants identified after the data were collected on two cohorts of children, this factor may play a very important role in this population with respect to the vitality of Yiddish, which is why this question was added before the data were collected on a new cohort of children.

4, 5, 6, 7 These questions are typical of language background information questionnaires. They aim at controlling for the fact that infants and toddlers' early and subsequent language development is affected by their hearing status and for the fact that they may already have or they may be likely to develop (given the family history) language problems.

Table 1 Background information questionnaire (shaded question are those for which the answers were open)

<b>1b Gender</b>					
Female			Male		
<b>2.a How old is your child (between 14 and 36 months)?</b>					
<b>2.b Date of birth</b>					
<b>2.c Today's date</b>					
<b>3.a Does your child have any siblings?</b>					
Yes			No		
<b>3.b. If yes How many? Is your child the oldest, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> etc?</b>					
<b>3. c Please list them in order with their dates of birth and gender</b>					
Table provides with columns for ranking of older and younger siblings, dates of birth and gender					
<b>4. Were there any complications during pregnancy (premature etc)?</b>					
Yes			No		
<b>5. Does your child have hearing difficulties?</b>					
Yes			No		
<b>6. Did your child have any serious illness?</b>					
Yes			No		
<b>7. b Is there a family history of language disorders (dyslexia etc)?</b>					
Yes			No		
<b>8.a has your child been exposed to Yiddish and English from birth?</b>					
Yes			No		
<b>8. b if not at approximately what age (in months) was your child first exposed to Yiddish?... English?....</b>					
<b>8. c If your child has siblings what language(s) do they tend to use with each other:</b>					
Only Yiddish		Half Yiddish Half English		Mostly Yiddish (i.e. 90%-75% of the time)	Mostly English (i.e. 90%-75% of the time)
<b>9. Approximately how much is your child exposed to:</b>					
Yiddish 100%	Yiddish 90% and English 10%	Yiddish 75% and English 25%	Yiddish 50% and English 50%	Yiddish 25% and English 75%	Yiddish 10% and English 90%
<b>10.a Do you/other caregivers regularly read books to your child?</b>					
Yes			No		
<b>10.b If yes, how often:</b>					
Once a month		Once a week		2/3 times a week	Everyday
<b>10.c What proportion of time do you/other caregivers spend reading in Yiddish and in English to your child?</b>					
Yiddish 100%	Yiddish 90% and English 10%	Yiddish 75% and English 25%	Yiddish 50% and English 50%	Yiddish 25% and English 75%	Yiddish 10% and English 90%
<b>11.a Has the father been exposed to Yiddish since birth?</b>					
Yes			No		
<b>11.b If not, at what age did the father start learning to speak Yiddish?</b>					
<b>11.c The father speaks which of the varieties below?</b>					
Hasidic/ Hungarian	Hasidic/ Polish	Hasidic/ Russian	Lithuanian (Litvish)	Other (please specify)	
<b>11.d What language(s) does the father use with the child?</b>					
Only Yiddish	Half Yiddish Half English	Mostly Yiddish (i.e. 90%-75% of the time)		Mostly English (i.e. 90%-75% of the time)	
<b>12.a Has the mother been exposed to Yiddish since birth?</b>					
Yes			No		
<b>12.b If not, at what age did the mother start learning to speak Yiddish?</b>					
<b>12.c The mother speaks which of the varieties below?</b>					
Hasidic/ Hungarian	Hasidic/ Polish	Hasidic/ Russian	Lithuanian (Litvish)	Other (please specify)	
<b>12.d What language(s) does the mother use with the child?</b>					
Only Yiddish	Half Yiddish Half English	Mostly Yiddish (i.e. 90%-75% of the time)		Mostly English (i.e. 90%-75% of the time)	
<b>13. Who participates on the day-to-day care of your child (check all that apply)</b>					
Home-based Early Head Start		Center-based Early Head Start		Mother/ female guardian	Father/ Male guardian
Non-parent caregiver (e.g. grandparent, nanny) in your home (___ hours/week)			Other, please explain..... (hours/week)		
<b>14. Occupation. Please give a specific (e.g. computer technician, dental assistant, deli manager) rather than a general category (e.g., medical field, owner, self-employed)</b>					
Mother	Occupation	Description	Father	Occupation	Description
<b>15. Education. Please circle the highest grade completed. Use 12 for high school graduate, 16 for college graduate and 18 for advanced degree</b>					
Mother	6 to 18		Father	6 to 18	

8a and 8b Although the Critical Period Hypothesis for language acquisition that originally postulated puberty as the end of the period during which language learning abilities are optimal (Lenneberg, 1969) has very much been questioned, age of acquisition is still considered an important factor. Current studies tend to demonstrate that the decrease in the ability to learn a language may be more gradient than was originally proposed by Lenneberg (1969). According to recent studies, the developmental trajectory of sequential childhood bilinguals (that is children who acquire a second language before they fully master their first language, which is the case of many pre-school English Language Learners) shares similarities with late L2 rather than L1 acquisition pattern (e.g. Yarmolinskaya & Barriere, 2005). More studies on different ages of acquisition in young children will help us better understand the importance and impact of this factor on early stages of language development.

9: Theories and models of language acquisition vary with respect to the role they assign to the input. Both emergentist (Bates, 1993) and constructivist (Tomaseello, 2000) approaches to language acquisition assign a crucial role to the input that they conceptualize as the driving force underpinning the language acquisition process. In contrast, according to maturationist/generativist approaches, the child's contribution to the acquisition process is conceptualized as the driving force while the input plays a minor role. Although these three theories were originally developed to account for first language acquisition by monolingual children, they must also account for bilingual development and the study of bilingual development can also test the hypotheses based on these theories (Genesee, 2001, Meisel, 2007). Studies to date have focused on balanced bilinguals (exposed to 50% of the time to each of their language) and report same speed and pattern of development for monolinguals and bilinguals in each of their languages (e.g. Sinka & Schelletter, 1998)- that tends to support the generativist/maturationist account. However very few studies have examined the speed and pattern of development of unbalanced bilinguals- i.e. children exposed more to one language than the other. While a few investigators have recently concluded that the development of the weak – i.e. the less often used, less preferred and less developed- language in unbalanced bilinguals exhibits patterns that characterize the acquisition of a Second Language after a first one is fully mastered, the interpretation of their findings has recently been challenged (Meisel, 2007). The characterization of the learning of the weak language has to be systematically investigated for conclusions to be drawn (Meisel, 2007). This issue also has important educational and clinical implications to decide whether children exposed to the same language combinations but who do not receive the same percentage of input to each language should be evaluated in the same way.

10a, 10b, and 10 c Home literacy activities are correlated with oral language development in monolingual children, including their vocabulary and grammatical skills (Tabors, 2005). One of the interesting aspects of bilingual development is that not all bilingual children are exposed to literacy in their two languages and the amount and proportion of literacy activities in each language may vary from child to child and may differ from the percentage of oral exposure to each language.

11a and 11b and 12 a, 12b YVY serves a range of religious Yiddish-speaking groups that differ in their use of Yiddish (Isaacs, 2000): they include Belz, Bobovers, Chabads, Gers, Litvish and Satmars. The history of each group and individual has had an impact on the intergenerational transmission of Yiddish that in a few cases has been interrupted and is being revived which results in the non-native use of Yiddish by a few parents. The language produced by late language learners typically differs from that of native speakers especially with respect to pronunciation and morphology, with obligatory morphological markers being omitted (Epstein, Flynn & Martohardjono, 1996). These characteristics impact on language development. For instance, the language development of children exposed to non-native Sign Language input exhibits a developmental trajectory that is different from those exposed to native input and the structures they produce surpass those produced by their non-native parents (Singleton & Newport, 2005). This issue has not been systematically investigated in groups of bilingual children exposed to spoken languages.

11c and 12c The different Hasidic groups mentioned above do not only differ in their patterns of use of Yiddish with respect to percentage of use in relation to English and to native versus non-native input, they also differ in terms of geographical areas their parents, grand-parents, great-grandparents etc came from. The long history of Yiddish and the spread of its use over a very large territory in Europe (between Alsace and Eastern Russia and Lithuania to Romania) explain the development of distinct varieties (Birnbaum, 1979, Baumgarten, 2002). The use of Yiddish in the US has been documented in a number of studies (e.g. Fishman, 1952, Hudson-Edwards, 1981, Jochnowitz, 1981, Levine, 2000, Peletz, 1990, Kronovet, 2005) but the data have been collected on other

communities and/or on other generations of speakers<sup>2</sup>. Based on the neighborhoods in which the YVY centers are located, it was predicted that most participants would be exposed to two varieties of Central Yiddish that are derived from those that used to be spoken in Poland and Hungary. They differ at the lexical and phonological levels (the *r* is uvular in Polish Yiddish and trilled in Hungarian Yiddish) but they share the same grammar. In Brooklyn, these two varieties tend to correspond to two different neighborhoods- Polish Yiddish being mainly used in Borough Park and Hungarian Yiddish in Williamsburg. The third variety of Yiddish used by a smaller proportion of Yeled V'Yalda population is typically referred to as Northeastern Yiddish- that used to be spoken in Bielorussia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and parts of Northern Ukraine. Northeastern Yiddish differs from Central Yiddish in its phonology, a few lexical items and morphosyntax. The morphosyntactic differences include a) a different set of subject pronouns presented in table 2 below and b) an invariable form- *zikh*- for the reflexive marker whereas Central Yiddish has different forms corresponding to different persons.

Table 2- Subject and Reflexive pronouns in Central Yiddish and Northeastern Yiddish

Persons	Subject Pronouns		Reflexive Pronouns	
	CENTRAL YIDDISH	NORTHEASTERN YIDDISH	CENTRAL YIDDISH	NORTHEASTERN YIDDISH
1 <sup>st</sup> sing.		ikh	mikh	zikh
2 <sup>nd</sup> sing. informal	di*	du*	dikh	
2 <sup>nd</sup> sing. formal		ir	zikh	
3 <sup>rd</sup> sing. masc.		er		
3 <sup>rd</sup> sing. Fem.		zi		
3 <sup>rd</sup> neuter		es		
1 <sup>st</sup> plur.	inz [preverbal] V mir [post-verbal]*	mir*		
2 <sup>nd</sup> plur.	ets**	ir**	aikh	zikh
3 <sup>rd</sup> plur.	zay*	zey*	zikh	

\*Different pronouns associated with the same agreement markers across dialects.

\*\*Different pronouns associated with different agreement markers in each variety

After the data collection on the first cohort, it became clear that it was very important to identify which Yiddish variety/ies each individual child had been exposed to.

The impact of exposure to two language varieties has received very little attention in the language acquisition literature. A study on the acquisition of plurals in two varieties of Spanish that vary with respect to this feature has reported that children exposed to two varieties do not exhibit the same acquisition patterns as those exposed to one variety (Miller 2007). Given that a few of our participants may be exposed to two varieties of Yiddish that have slightly different grammars, it was important to include this question.

**Questions 11d and 12d** The Grammont principle applies to bilingual families in which one parent uses one language while the other uses another language with their child(ren). According to anecdotal reports from YVY professionals and parents, this principle does not typically apply to YVY Yiddish-speaking families. In addition mothers are often said to be more proficient in and use more English than fathers who spend more time on religious studies that involve the use of Yiddish and Hebrew rather than English. In order to systematically consider this factor this question was added before the data were collected on the last cohort.

**Question 14 and 15** Parents level of education that are typically tied to their professions and associated with different interactional styles with children impact language development (e.g. Hoff, 2006). This question is the same as that used in the background information questionnaire developed for American English (Fenson et al., 1993). It may need to be reformulated in the future since it is not clear whether it focuses on secular education only or both secular and religious education and members of the Hasidic community may receive very different levels of education in each area.

From a theoretical perspective, the exceptional range of factors that characterize the demographic and linguistic contexts in which Yiddish-speaking children are raised and their (possible) effects (or lack of) on language development are at the core of current theoretical debates. From an educational perspective, the top three socio-demographic factors associated with children's difficulties when entering kindergarten are mothers' low level of education, low income of the family and use of a language other than English (US census 1995). According to a conservative estimate, 30% of the children under 5 in the US will use a language other than English by 2015 (Fix & Passel, 2005). Fifteen percent will use Spanish as a Home Language and the other 15% will use other languages that have been under-represented in current bilingual research in the US, thus the understanding of the typical oral language development of English Language Learners "is an important and foundational area in which more work is needed"



(IRA& NICHHHD, 2007). The same report emphasizes the need for the development of appropriate assessments for children whose home-language is not English. From a clinical perspective one of the important challenges that Speech and Language Pathologists have to face is the difficulty in identifying language impairment in children exposed to more than one language. Such a difficulty leads to both over-identification and under-identification of language impairment in bilingual populations (Bedore & Peña, 2008). Improving our understanding of the demographic and linguistic factors that impact on bilingual children's typical development will contribute to a better distinction between bilingual children whose acquisition of their Home Language and English is typical and those whose pattern of development is delayed and/or atypical and who require clinical services.

### *3.2.2 Data Collection procedure*

The data collected consisted of a) the background information questionnaire described above, b) the MBCDI adaptation to Yiddish (described in section 5 below) and c) of the American English MBCDI (Fenson et al., 1993). The organization of the data collection was discussed with different directors at YVY and it was decided to distribute the questionnaire material through different programs that serve infants and toddlers of the target age range- 14 to 38 months:

(i) Home-Based Early Head Start (for infants and toddlers between 6 and 36 months) Families enrolled in this program benefit from weekly visits of family workers who are trained to assess and provide advice on children's development as well as to help respond to any needs of the family that impact on the infants and toddlers. In turn, family workers participate in weekly group meetings with the supervisors of their programs. It is at this regular venue that they were presented with the aims of this project by the author. They were then given the questionnaire material to be distributed to the families and they ensured that the families completed and returned them.

(ii) Center-Based Early Head Start (for toddlers between 18 and 36 months) Toddlers participating in this program come to a YVY center four days a week. Each class is made up of a maximum of 8 toddlers who are taught by a teacher and an assistant teacher. The education professionals use the language in which the children are most comfortable with. Each of them was explained the aim of the project and they distributed the questionnaire material to the parents. For those parents whose children come by bus envelopes were given to the children with instructions for parents on the labels. If necessary, the receptionists/administrative assistants of the centers reminded the parents by phone to return the questionnaires.

(iii) Combination of Home-Based and Center-Based Early Head Start Toddlers enrolled in this program benefit from a combination of the two services described above: they attend their center two days a week and are visited once a week by a family worker who is one of the two education professionals in charge of their class.

The project has very much benefited from the reputation of YVY known to provide excellent services (as attested by the outcomes of numerous reviews and its receipt of the 2005 Outstanding Early Childhood Program Awards granted by the New York State Education Department of School Improvement and Community Services) and from the strong commitment of YVY professionals involved. YVY's mission is to provide a professional education to young children in a context that respects each child's cultural heritage. Early Head Start and Head Start policies value multiculturalism and encourage the employment of education professionals who reflect the communities of the children they serve. In line with YVY mission and Head Start policies, YVY Early Head Start serving Yiddish-speaking children are themselves Yiddish-speaking members of the same cultural and religious communities. This procedure helps overcome a common obstacle in the study of minority languages, namely the observer's paradox, which in the case of Yiddish could have been problematic. At a national level Yiddish does not enjoy the same status as it does in the Hasidic community and for the parents to respond as truthfully as possible to the background information questionnaire, they had to feel that the researchers involved in this project did not have any bias towards any of the languages they use.

(iv) YVY Clinic: For the collection of data on the last cohort, participants were recruited using an additional program: one of the clinics that provides services to Yiddish-speaking clients in Williamsburg. When parents sit in the waiting room while one of their children receive clinical services (including occupational or physical therapy or speech and language pathology), if they also have an infant or toddlers in the target age range they are asked to complete a questionnaire. In the context of this program the project also benefited from the commitment of the YVY administrative and clinical professionals who made sure that the questionnaire material was promptly returned.

The data collection procedure was innovative in that to the best of our knowledge no language assessment has been developed by a service provider in the context of such a close collaboration with professionals who a) are

members of the same linguistic and cultural community as the target population and b) provide services to the target population.

The relevance and usefulness of this project have been recognized at different levels:

- (i) At a regional level, YVY was praised for the undertaking of this project by New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Program Monitoring and Quality Improvement Early Intervention after the collection on the first cohort of participants;
- (ii) At a national level, the project proposal, the background information questionnaire and the Yiddish adaptation of the MBCDI were reviewed by the scientific committee of the MBBCDI composed of six experts in developmental psychology and in communication science and the project was approved before the data were collected on the first cohort.
- (iii) It has been presented at different regional (e.g. Departments of Communication, Psychology and Linguistics of City University of New York, New York University, Long Island University), national (e.g. MIT) and international (e.g. Germany and Canada) venues after the data were collected on the first two cohorts.

News of these signs of recognition at a regional, national and international level have been systematically communicated to YVY parents and professionals at meetings and through YVY newsletter. They have had a positive effect on the project: YVY parents and professionals feel that the language needs of their community are at last being recognized and it has been a way to maintain the initial enthusiasm throughout the first three years the project.

Several outcomes enable us to conclude that the questionnaire format of the project and the data collection procedure mediated through YVY service providers were successful: 100% of the questionnaires were returned (although a small percentage have missing information); the family workers have communicated the positive feedback expressed by many parents after they have completed the questionnaires to the author; and parents themselves sometimes spontaneously provide positive feedback, e.g. "[...] *It truly is amazing to see how much my little one talks! Thanks for making me aware!*" written by the mother of a child participant on the Yiddish adaptation of the MBCDI.

#### 4. Vitality, Dominance and Use

As explained in section 3.2.2 above, the participants in the project were recruited through a YVY clinic (2007-2008 cohort) and through YVY Early Head Start programs (all cohorts). For the latter, the recruitment criterion was the use of Yiddish as a Home Language as indicated on the YVY central enrolment database. This measure is not sufficient to predict the intergenerational transmission of Yiddish. Several criteria need to be met for the third and fourth generations to maintain the immigrant language as its first, native language (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). The background information questionnaire (see section 3.2.1) enabled us to assess the vitality, use and dominance of Yiddish with several measures that included: general percentage of oral exposure, percentage of input from each parent, percentage of use with siblings, and percentage of exposure in the context of home-literacy activities. Cross-sectional data were collected on a total of 92 participants between 14 and 38 months. Ten were excluded from the analyses below because they were already receiving Early Intervention (and may therefore exhibit language delay) or the material returned had many incomplete sections. Most participants' parents have relatively low education (Figure 3): the majority have completed high school and a small proportion have college education. It is an unusual population sample for a language acquisition studies in that it includes a very small proportion of first borns and many second, third and fourth borns as well as 5<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> borns.

Indications of the vitality of Yiddish include the facts that the vast majority are exposed to Yiddish at least 75% of the time (figure 5) and that it is also the dominant language among siblings for most children. Figures 7 and 8 confirm anecdotal reports regarding the fact that the Grammont principle (one parent, one language in bilingual homes) does not apply to this community, including to balanced bilinguals: most mothers use a combination of Yiddish and English. Mothers' and fathers' input is the same, except for five children, four of whom have fathers

Figure 3: Parents' education (2005-2008 cohorts excluding questionnaires missing this information)

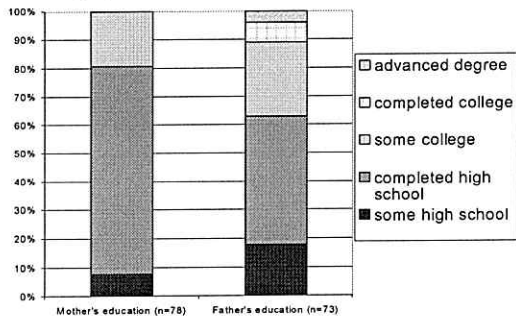


Figure 4: Percentage of participants in relation to their birth order (all cohorts, n=82)

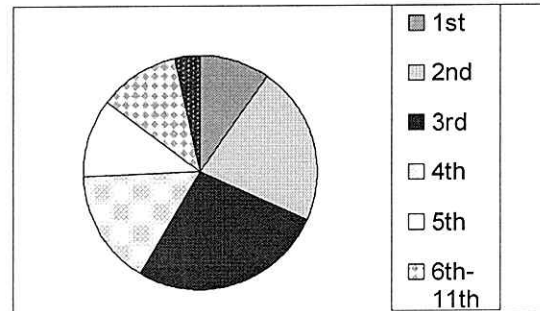


Table 3: Breakdown of the different varieties of Yiddish (only last cohorts 2006/7 & 2007/8)

Same/different	Varieties	N	%
Same	Hungarian/Williamsburg	23	34
	Polish/Borough Park	16	24
	Russian/Crown Heights	4	6
	Yiddish-unspecified	2	3
Different	Hungarian/Williamsburg & Polish/Borough Park	3	4
	Hungarian/Williamsburg & 'Hebrew Yiddish'	3	4
	Yiddish-unspecified & Polish/Borough Park	2	3
	Polish/Borough Park & Belgian	1	1
No answer for one or two parents		13	19
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>67</b>	<b>100</b>

Figure 5: Proportion of children (n= 82) exposed to different percentages of Yiddish (and English)

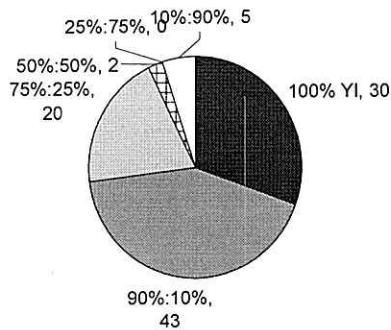


Figure 6: Proportion of children who use different percentages of Yiddish (and English) with siblings (2007-2008 cohort only, n= 23)

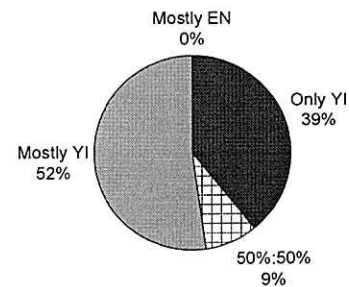


Figure 7: Proportion of mothers who address their child with different percentages of Yiddish (and English) input (2007-2008 cohort only, n=23)

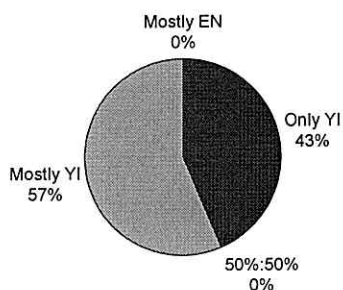
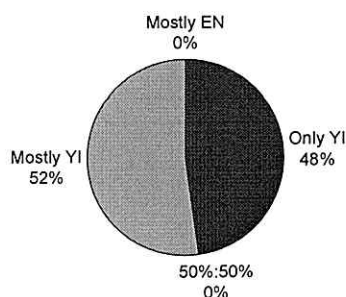


Figure 8: Proportion of fathers who address their child with different percentages of Yiddish (and English) input (2007-2008 cohort only, n= 22, due to one questionnaire missing this information)



that speak only Yiddish and mothers who speak mostly Yiddish, and one of whom has a father who speaks mostly Yiddish and mother who speaks only Yiddish. For the last two cohorts data were collected regarding native input (from 66 fathers and 67 mothers who answered questions 11c and 12c in table 1): only one child was exposed exclusively to non-native input from both parents. Three other children receive non-native input from their father and four others from their mothers. The breakdown of the different varieties is presented below. Not surprisingly given the locations of YVY programs, most children are exposed to Williamsburg/Hungarian or Borough Park/Polish Yiddish and a smaller proportion to Russian Yiddish (table 3). While 67% children are exposed to the same varieties, a small proportion (4%) hear two different varieties that vary mainly at the lexical and phonological levels (Hungarian/Williamsburg and Polish/Borough Park Yiddish) while 8% are exposed to varieties that also vary at the morphosyntactic levels. It is interesting to note that a substantial proportion (19%) of parents do not answer this question and a few others seem to find it problematic: their answers include “good old Yiddish”, “Hasidic Yiddish” (that is likely to refer to Galician/Polish Yiddish) (in the category unspecified) and “Hebrew Yiddish” (not Israeli Yiddish) that seems to be referring to a combination of Yiddish and Hebrew. Figure 9 represent the proportions of children exposed to the same and different percentages of oral and written exposure to Yiddish and English, i.e. answers to question 10.c in relation to question 9 in table 1. In most monolingual and dominant oral Yiddish contexts the percentages of oral and written exposure are similar. In contrast for children who are not dominant in Yiddish the percentage of exposure to literacy activities in Yiddish is more varied and these children tend to be exposed to a higher proportion of English written material. .

The results of the background questionnaire indicate the vitality of Yiddish among Yiddish-speaking Hasidic infants and toddlers at YVY on the basis of a range of measure that assess intergenerational transmission including the percentage of use of Yiddish by parents and among siblings as well as home-literacy activities.

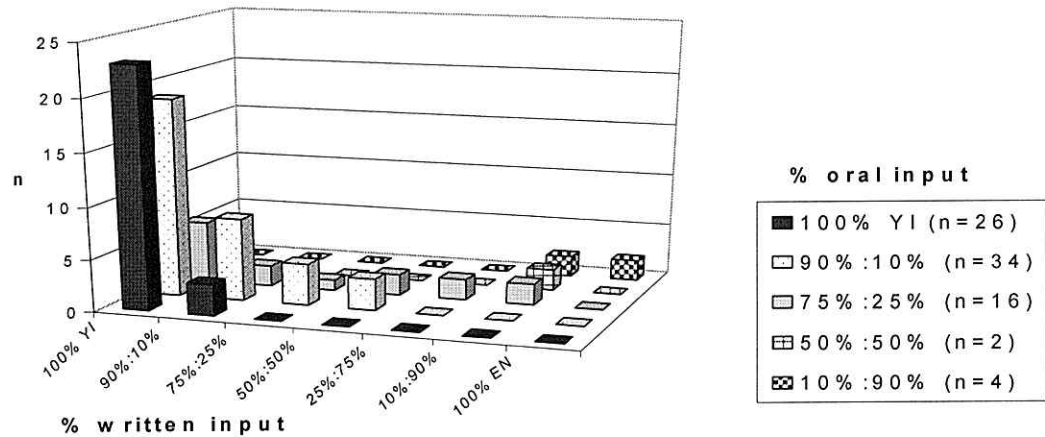
Although no data were collected on the attitude of the parents towards English and Yiddish, two outcomes cast light on the status they assign to Yiddish. When the questionnaire material was returned incomplete, the American English MBCDI, rather than the Yiddish adaptation, was left incomplete. At least two factors may explain this. The American English MBCDI’s lack of cultural and linguistic adequacy for this religious community (in that the vocabulary items tend to reflect mainstream American culture) makes it difficult for the parents to complete and/or it may reflect their attachment to Yiddish. Secondly at least one parent overestimated the exposure of their child to Yiddish: 100% exposure to Yiddish was selected but both the Yiddish and the English versions of the MBCDI that provided evidence of the child’s learning of both languages were completed.

## 5. The Yiddish adaptation of the MBCDI

### 5.1 Introduction

The Yiddish adaptation of the MBCDI enabled us to obtain preliminary findings on the vocabulary and

Figure 9: Proportions of children exposed to different percentages of oral and written input in Yiddish and English (2005-2009 cohorts, n= 82)



morphosyntactic development of infants and toddlers exposed to Yiddish and it responds to the needs of the clinicians for a first Yiddish language screening assessment for infants and toddlers.

### 5.2 The lexicon

The original MBCDI division into different semantic and lexical categories (Fenson et al., 1993) was retained as it has proved reliable to classify children's early lexical and morphosyntactic development across many languages (Bornstein et al., 2004). Additions and substitutions of lexical items were incorporated to reflect the cultural and linguistic environments of the child. The use of different lexical items in the distinct varieties described above was considered as well as the borrowing of English lexical items. Up to three entries are provided for lexical items for which dialectal variation and/or the influence of English has been identified. Parents were asked to circle the word their child uses (more often). The English words appear both in Roman and Hebrew scripts and when different varieties use distinct spellings in Hebrew script both orthographies appear. The Yiddish adaptation of the MBCDI contains a total of 834 lexical items including 12 animal sounds, 822 words including 694 content words (472 nouns, 129 verbs, 21 adverbs, and 72 adjectives) and 128 functions words.

### 5.3 Decontextualized language use

The Yiddish MBCDI adaptation collects information on children's use of language by asking parents if their child uses language to refer to past events, anticipate future events and express object permanence, associations between objects and locations and possession. Each question receive a score of 0 if the child does not use language yet to express this concept, 1 if s/he does so sometimes and 2 if s/he does so often. The maximum score is 10.

### 5.4 Morphosyntax

The Yiddish Communicative Development Inventory collects information on children's morphosyntactic development, including a) a list of 128 function words that include pronouns, determiners, auxiliaries, modals, quantifiers, prepositions, question-words and negative markers, b) five questions on the use of auxiliaries and circumfixes that mark tense and agreement in Yiddish; c) a section on the correct pluralization of nouns in which six morphological processes found in Yiddish are represented; d) a section on over-regularizations that contain three over-regularizations of nouns and three over-regularizations of past tense; e) a question on whether the child has started combining words (not yet, sometimes or often); f) the child's 3 longest utterances that the parent is expected to write down; g) a sentence complexity section that includes 36 sentences for which the parent is asked to

select one option (if their child has started combining words) including a child-like ungrammatical or less elaborated version, to which a score of one is assigned and an adult-like grammatical and more elaborated version that is assigned a score of two. Given that to date no study has documented the acquisition of Yiddish as an L1, three sources of developmental evidence were used to inform the other sections tapping morphosyntactic development, namely: transcriptions of utterances produced by Yiddish-speaking children by students as parts of the requirements of a course that the author taught; the observations of a consultant who used to be a teacher and has been an ASHA certified Speech and Language pathologist for six years and a graduate student in Speech and Language Pathology of their own children (20 in total) and the acquisition patterns documented for languages that, like Yiddish, are Germanic including Dutch (Haegeman, 1995) and German (Clahsen, 1991, 1999, Collings, 1990, Köpke, 1998, Schlyter, 1990).

## **6. Patterns of acquisition**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Detailed analyses of the data collected on 69 children were conducted. The analyses focused on a factor that has not been systematically examined on a substantial group of bilingual children- percentage of exposure- given that the participants varied with respect to this measure. To avoid the effects of additional factors, three criteria were used to exclude participants: a) exposure to non-native input, b) exposure to two varieties that have different grammars and c) in the case of children exposed to both English and Yiddish late exposure (i.e. not from birth) to one of the languages.

### **6.2 Vocabulary**

Children exposed to 100% Yiddish, 90% Yiddish, 75% Yiddish exhibit the same pattern with respect to the relation between chronological age and number of words produced (Barriere et al., 2007). In contrast vocabulary development of the balanced bilinguals is protracted in Yiddish (see de Houwer, et al. 2007 for similar results and Petitto, & Holowka, 2002 for different results). The few children exposed to 10% exhibit an even more protracted lexical development: two do not produce any Yiddish words at 24 months the other two produce 20 (at 20 months) and 68 words (at 34 months).

### **6.3 Decontextualized use of language**

Children exposed to 50% Yiddish tend to reach a higher score with a lesser vocabulary compared to dominant Yiddish-speakers. Secondly the same children do not systematically obtain the same scores in Yiddish and in English, with most differences being significant (Barriere et al., 2007). Finally the more balanced the bilinguals the more likely they are to have the same or similar scores in the two languages (Barriere et al., 2007).

### **6.4 Morphosyntax**

#### *6.4.1 Results 1: The temporal relation between vocabulary and morphosyntactic development*

Compared to Yiddish-dominant bilinguals, balanced Yiddish-English bilinguals reach a higher score in the morphosyntactic complexity section with a lesser vocabulary. More detailed analyses reveal that determiners, the pluralization of nouns and subject-verb agreement emerge around 18 months and are mastered around 30 months by children exposed to 100%, 90%, 75% and 50% Yiddish. What is interesting is that the balanced bilinguals produce half the words of their dominant Yiddish-speaking age-mates when these features emerge and are used productively<sup>3</sup>.

#### *6.4.2 Results 2: The acquisition of features that are similar and different across the two languages*

Table 4 below outlines the key characteristics of English and Yiddish and Table 5 lists the predictions based on the Input-driven (adapted from an emergentist approach to language development) and the Rich Morphology (proposed by Garman et al., 2000 on the basis of a maturationist/generative approach) hypotheses.

Determiners, plurals and subject-verb agreement markers (see table 4) emerge and are mastered at the same age in monolinguals, dominant and balanced bilinguals- demonstrating that the proportion of input has no effect at least between 100% and 50%. They are mastered earlier in Yiddish than in English by balanced bilinguals. This result provides support for the Rich Morphology hypothesis (see table 5). The delayed acquisition of these three

features in children exposed to 10% of Yiddish and 25% and 10% English in their non-dominant language indicates that the percentage of input has an effect on morphosyntactic development below a certain level. The possessive marker emerges at the same age (between 18 and 30 months) in monolingual, dominant and balanced Yiddish bilinguals. No dominant-English bilingual exposed to 10% Yiddish, including a 36 month old produces the possessive marker in Yiddish, but does so in English. This result does not support the Input Driven Hypothesis (see table 5).

Results 1 and 2 indicate a lack of effect of percentage of input on the speed of morphosyntactic development between 100% and 50% but a delaying effect when the input is 25% or 10%.

#### 6.4.3 Results 3: Acquisition pattern of monolingual, dominant and balanced bilinguals

The examination of the order of acquisition of the various linguistic features listed in table 4 indicates that monolinguals, dominant bilinguals and balanced bilinguals exhibit the same pattern of development in that the different linguistic features are acquired in the same order. However, one of the drawbacks of this study is that it was not possible to check whether the weak language (25% English or 10% English or Yiddish) exhibits a distinct developmental pattern: the data were collected on children who had not reached an advanced enough stage of morphosyntactic development in their non-dominant language, with most of them not producing any of the linguistic features listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Key differences between Yiddish and English

YIDDISH	ENGLISH
WORD ORDER <sup>41</sup>	
V2- the inflected verb is the 2 <sup>nd</sup> constituent of the sentence	Not V2
DETERMINER PHRASE	
Determiners	
Marked for case, gender and number (different forms for subject, object etc)- Examples: Der hint gait avek The dog goes away versus Ir geb dem hint a bayn I give to-the dog a bone	Not marked for case
Plural of nouns	
Rich paradigm: 7 different plural morphemes including: - er, -s/es, -n/en, -ckh -kh/-akh, -im, vowel change, no change	Regular -s/-z/-iz and small set of irregulars (i.e.children, men)
Possessive	
Possessive's marker	
VERB PHRASE	
Subject-verb agreement	
- Rich and uniform paradigm: overt person and number marking: 1 <sup>st</sup> singular: Ø 2 <sup>nd</sup> singular informal: -st 2 <sup>nd</sup> singular formal: -t 3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular: t 1 <sup>st</sup> person plural: -en 2 <sup>nd</sup> person plural: -ts 3 <sup>rd</sup> person plural: -en - Very few irregular verbs	-Poor morphological paradigm : only 3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular (-s) overt marking  - Very few irregular verbs
Pro-drop	
Pro-drop in 2 <sup>nd</sup> person singular	Not pro-drop
Tense-marking	
Systematic use of auxiliary except in the present	Tense expressed through verbal morphology (past tense -ed) and use of auxiliary

Table 5: Predictions based on Input Driven and Rich Morphology Hypotheses

LINGUISTIC FEATURES	Input Driven Hypothesis: <i>Distinct features are sensitive to quantity of input whereas similar features are not.</i>	Rich Morphology Hypothesis <i>The lead language expresses a linguistic feature through a richer morphological paradigm.</i>
Determiners	Distinct in Yiddish and English so timing of acquisition will reflect percentage of input	In balanced bilinguals, Yiddish determiners acquired earlier than English determiners
Plurals	Distinct in Yiddish and English so timing of acquisition will reflect percentage of input	In balanced bilinguals Yiddish plurals acquired earlier than English plurals
Possessive	Same markers in Yiddish and English: no impact of % input and simultaneous acquisition	Same paradigm: should be acquired at the same age in balanced bilinguals
Subject-verb agreement	Distinct in Yiddish and English so timing of acquisition should reflect percentage of input	In balanced bilinguals Yiddish subject-verb agreement acquired earlier than English subject-verb agreement

6.5 Summary, interpretation and implications of the results

Vocabulary The percentage of the input has a moderate effect on the speed of vocabulary development: while no differences was noted between monolingual children and those exposed to 90% and 75% Yiddish, the few children exposed to 50% and 10% Yiddish exhibit protracted vocabulary development.

Decontextualized language use While no difference was found between monolinguals and dominant Yiddish-speakers, balanced bilinguals express more concepts with a lesser vocabulary. This finding needs to be related to the differences found in their vocabulary development: balanced bilinguals tend to be older than their vocabulary-matched monolingual and Yiddish-dominant age peers so the number of concepts they express verbally most likely reflects their cognitive maturation rather than their protracted vocabulary development in one of their languages. Another interesting finding that emerged from these analyses was the significant differences between mapping scores in the two languages and the fact that the more balanced the exposure to each language the more similar the scores. Three factors may explain these differences: a) a qualitative input- driven explanation according to which the children’s scores reflect differences in the decontextualized language use in the input in each language, b) a quantitative input driven explanation according to which even when the proportion of decontextualized use in the input is the same in both languages the score of the child reflects the fact that they need a certain proportion of input in order for this decontextualized use to have an effect on their own language use, c) a child-centered hypothesis that would consider their individual characteristics and their relation to each of their languages. At least one source of evidence is problematic for the second of these hypotheses: children do not systematically express more concepts verbally in their dominant language (Barriere et al., 2007).

Morphosyntax The temporal relation that has been found to typically characterize monolingual development (e.g. Bates et al., 1988, Bornstein et al, 2004) was also found to apply to monolingual and dominant bilingual Yiddish speakers, but not to balanced bilinguals: their morphosyntactic developmental stage was found to surpass what may be predicted from their vocabulary score (see Kim Yang & Lust, 2007 for similar results on a Chinese/English bilingual and Marchman, 2004 and Conboy et al, 2006 for different results on Spanish/English bilinguals). From an educational and clinical perspective this result suggests that vocabulary testing may not be as good a predictor of morphosyntactic abilities in bilinguals.

The results demonstrate that for most aspects of morphosyntax investigated, there is no difference between the 100%, 90% and 75% and 50% Yiddish exposure groups, with respect to age of emergence and mastery of similar and distinct linguistic features. Features that are expressed with a richer morphological paradigm are acquired earlier than the same features expressed through a poorer morphological paradigm, which supports the Rich Morphology Hypothesis. However a delaying effect of the percentage of input was noted when children are exposed 25% or 10% of a language. The weak language hypothesis could not be tested due to absence of data on these children at a more advanced stage of development in their weak language.

From a clinical and educational perspective, these results suggest that percentage of exposure is a factor that should be taken into consideration when assessing children. The findings that emerge from this study demonstrate that percentage of exposure has different effects on:

1. vocabulary development where the effect seems to be relatively gradient;



2. on the mapping between language and concepts- which suggests that evaluation of bilingual children's use of decontextualized language should consider both languages;
3. and acquisition of morphosyntax where children exposed to 100%, 90%, 75% and 50% should be evaluated in the same way since they develop at the same speed and follow the same developmental trajectory whereas children exposed to 25% or 10% exhibit a delay in their acquisition of their weak language.

## 7. Conclusions

The great influx of Hasidic Yiddish speakers arrived in Brooklyn after World War II (Baumgarten, 2002). Those immigrants are now grandparents and great-grandparents. The results of this study contribute to the evaluation of the vitality of Yiddish in a sample of their grand or great-grand children, ie the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generations. The findings indicate that among most families that have Yiddish as a home-language it is the dominant language according to several criteria including overall percentage of oral exposure, use with each parent, among siblings and during home-literacy activities. The first study on the acquisition of Yiddish also demonstrates that Yiddish-speaking Hasidic children are raised in a broad range of linguistic and demographic contexts that impact language development and that includes different percentages of exposure to Yiddish and English, different birth order, (non) native exposure, exposure to same/distinct varieties, exposure to different proportions of spoken and written language. The format and procedures that were developed and employed in order to conduct this study were innovative in that they involved the close collaboration with members of the linguistic and cultural community of the participants who also provide health and education services to the target population. The signs of recognition obtained from scientific committees and state reviewers facilitated the conduct of the project in that all those involved felt that the linguistic and cultural needs of Yiddish-speaking children are finally being acknowledged.

The psycholinguistic study of the acquisition patterns in relation to percentage of exposure contribute to the understanding of factors that impact language maintenance. While percentage of exposure was found to have a moderate effect on vocabulary development, it does not seem to have an effect on speed and acquisition of morphosyntax, at least up to 50% input. So three year old toddlers acquiring Yiddish (for children exposed to 100%, 90% and 75% Yiddish) or Yiddish and English (for children exposed to 50% of the time to each language) reach morphosyntactic milestones that are comparable to those of monolingual age-peers. From that perspective their language development profile is not different from children acquiring a (majority or minority) language and indicates that at this stage, intergenerational transmission to the next (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>) generations is possible. However percentages of exposure to Yiddish in this population typically decrease when they enter pre-school and may change again later. Subsequent stages in the language development of these children will depend on the educational contexts in which they are raised (Kaufman, 2008). A recent survey sponsored by the Fishman foundation (Otheguy, Slomanson & Webman, 2005) concludes that the current relatively low use of Yiddish in Jewish schools across the US does not stem from a lack of interest in Yiddish but from a lack of resources.

Follow-up studies that are currently being planned at YVY include the investigation of the acquisition of Yiddish and English by 4 and 5 year old children; the development of appropriate Yiddish language assessment for this age group; the study of different educational contexts that promote language, literacy and cognitive development in young children, an issue that is at the forefront of current education policies (IRA & NICHD, 2007 Kaufman, 2008). The findings that emerge from the first study on the acquisition of Yiddish demonstrates that the investigation of the vitality of Yiddish and its development in today's Hasidic Yiddish-speaking children brings a unique and rich contribution to psycholinguistic models of language development; to the identification of factors that determine bilingual development and to current debates in the field of education.

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*Disclaimer:* The approaches and views adopted in this chapter reflect those of the author and are not necessarily those of the YVY professionals, consultants and research assistants who have contributed to this project. Nor are they necessarily endorsed by the institutions that have supported this project and to which the author is affiliated.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Wollock (1994) presents interviews of parents who do not use Yiddish as a main language discussing their attempts to transmit Yiddish to their children. Levine (2000) investigates its incomplete acquisition in adult speakers of Yiddish. Kronovet (2005) examines the ideological status assigned to Yiddish by first generation American Yiddish speakers.

<sup>2</sup> Other varieties of Yiddish include Western Yiddish- that used to be spoken in France, Germany and the Netherlands. - and South Eastern Yiddish used in the South of Ukraine and Romania. The results of the study show that children enrolled at Yeled V'Yalda do not use these varieties (see table 3, section 4). It is important to note that although a movement to standardize Yiddish started in the early 20th century, it was initiated by (more) secular Jewish (including Marxist) communities whose cultures and views on religion, the arts, secular education and politics are very different from those of Hasidim. According to Jochnowicz (1981), Hasidic Yiddish has not been influenced by Standard Yiddish.

<sup>3</sup> The definitions of 'productive use' applied here is a) the use of a grammatical feature in at least 80% of the contexts in which it is required in the grammatical section described in section 5.4 and b) the selection of the option 'frequent' use in other sections tapping the production of plural, tense and agreement markers (see description in section 5.4).

<sup>4</sup> Although V-2 is of much interest given that a) Yiddish and English differ in this respect, b) many studies on the acquisition of Dutch and German have reported interesting findings with respect to the interactions between verbal morphology and V-2 order in acquisition (e.g. Poepfel & Wexler, 1993) and c) cases of transfer in bilingual German/English acquisition have been reported (Döpke, 1998), the pilot study did not consider this feature for two reasons. Before the pilot study was started no data had systematically been collected on the varieties of Yiddish spoken at Yeled V'Yalda and anecdotal reports pointed to the changes that this syntactic feature may be currently undergoing. Since then, Kahan-Newman (2007) has been investigating the adult use of V-2 by two generations of Hasidic Yiddish speakers. The findings that are emerging from her study which indeed point to a change currently affecting Yiddish syntax, have prompted the incorporation of a new section in the Yiddish Communicative Development Inventory that focuses on parents and children's use of V-2.