

Abstract

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'The Present Participle in Written Eastern European Yiddish. Its Formation and Use'

My talk attempts to sketch the formation and use of the present participle in written Eastern European Yiddish from the beginning of the 19th century, when the first longish texts in this variety of Yiddish were published, to the present day - a subject which was hitherto almost completely neglected within the field of Yiddish studies. The relevance of participles to the present project on Similarities and Differences between Clauses and Nominals emerges from their well-known Janus-faced inflectional and syntactic position, which is partly clausal and partly nominal. Examples for the study are drawn from selected prose works from the entire period.

In Eastern European Yiddish the original suffix employed for forming the present participle is *-(e)ndik*, e.g. *rejxerndik* from *rejxern* 'to smoke' and *zayendik* from *zayn* 'to be'. By the middle of the 19th century, however, another formant, *-(e)nd*, a borrowing from modern German, was introduced in written Yiddish. It gained immediate popularity and swiftly confined the older suffix *-(e)ndik* to a limited number of syntactic functions. The most significant of these was the use of the present participle as an adverbial comparable to subordinate clauses expressing time, cause or manner. *-(e)nd*, for its part, took over the other prominent syntactic function of a Yiddish participle, that of an attributive adjective. This remained the state of affairs in written Eastern European Yiddish until the outbreak of the First World War. In the subsequent decades *-(e)nd* started losing ground to the older suffix *-(e)ndik* which had, during the entire period, been the sole possible formant in spoken Yiddish. On the eve of the Second World War the borrowed suffix *-(e)nd* occurred only in participial adjectives - mostly of German origin - like *badaytnd* 'important', *folgnd* 'following' and *mosgebnd* 'decisive', and the syntactic functions of 'real', i.e. verbal, participles were taken over by participles formed by means of the older suffix *-(e)ndik*. In Eastern European Yiddish writings from after 1945, the formant *-(e)nd* was to disappear almost completely. One significant exception is the variety of Yiddish written by the Satmar Hasidim, the largest and most important faction of modern ultraorthodox Jews. Written Satmar Yiddish rather consistently features the syntactic distribution of *-(e)ndik* and *-(e)nd* that is typical of secular Yiddish writings from the period 1860 - 1920.