

The Discourse Functions of Yiddish Expletive ES + Subject-Postposing\*  
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1.0. Introduction.

All natural languages have different ways of saying 'the same thing', different linguistic expressions of truth-conditionally equivalent propositions. Such options exist at both the lexical and the syntactic levels. By now, it is well known that choices among these options are not random but that each form serves some communicative purpose at the level of discourse. (See Bolinger 1977, Erteschik-Shir and Lappin 1979, Green and Morgan 1981, Gundel 1974, Horn 1986, Kuno 1986, Ziv 1975, inter alia.) This paper, part of a larger ongoing project investigating the discourse functions of syntactic form in Yiddish, investigates the discourse functions of a particular sentence type, one in which the subject is Postposed, with a concomitant use of expletive ES, as exemplified in 1-3:

Subject-Postposing + Expletive ES:

- (1) es iz geshtorbn a raykher goy. [1]  
it is died a rich gentile  
'A rich gentile died.' (137)
- (2) es veln oyfshteyn groyse khakhomim fun daytshland...  
it will up-stand big sages from Germany...  
'Great sages from Germany will stand up...' (248)
- (3) es geyt epes in vald a yid.  
it goes something in wood a Jew  
'Some Jew seems to be walking in the woods.' (146)

2.0. Previous research.

Previous research, so far as I know, discusses in detail the discourse functions of neither Subject-Postposing nor expletive ES, though many studies have mentioned them. The bulk of attention to such sentences has been focused on the expletive.

Limiting our discussion to main clauses, we find that Zaretski (1929:168) notes that, when nothing precedes the finite verb, it may get the 'prefix' ES, as he calls it. He also notes that this cannot occur when the subject is a pronoun. Likewise, Weinreich (1971:330) notes that

expletive ES is 'never used when the logical subject is a pronoun'.

Mark (1978:374f.) names expletive ES the 'fictive subject'. He provides a criterion for distinguishing it from 'real' subject ES: if something else comes in first position, and the ES remains, following the finite verb, then it is a real subject ES; if it disappears, it is the expletive ES. He also notes that expletive ES does not occur when the real subject is a personal pronoun, and he suggests that the reason for this constraint is that ES is also a personal pronoun, implying that there is a general constraint on the cooccurrence of expletive pronouns with subject pronouns. We shall return to this below. Furthermore, Mark gives a syntactic function for expletive ES: so that the finite verb can stand in second position when nothing else in the sentence precedes it.

Birnbaum (1979:303), calling ES the 'anticipated subject', says only that the finite verb still comes in second position when it is used. Schachter (1986:230) discusses what he, like Mark, calls the 'fictive subject' with impersonal dative constructions but does not discuss expletive ES in general. Finally, Katz (1987ff.) discusses only presentational sentences with expletive ES and does not discuss its syntax or function.

### 3.0. Present study: goals and methods.

#### 3.1. Goals.

Clearly, the syntactic function of expletive ES is related to the Verb-Second (V/2) Constraint in Yiddish, as noted so clearly by Mark. But many questions remain, just two of which will be addressed below.

First, why are there no personal pronoun subjects in such sentences? Mark's suggestion, that expletive ES cannot cooccur with pronominal subjects because it is a fictive subject and itself a personal pronoun, depends, first, on taking expletive ES to be a subject, fictive or otherwise, and, second, on some motivation for disallowing coreference between a pronominal (real) subject and a pronominal 'fictive' subject. Since no arguments are presented for either, the suggestion is most unconvincing and the question remains as to why pronominal subjects are disallowed in ES-sentences.

Second, and hopefully relatedly, why do speakers choose to use expletive ES sentences with Postposed subjects in the first place? What discourse function, if any, do they serve?

#### 3.2. Framework and methods.

Before presenting the analysis and findings, I must first say a bit about the syntactic framework and the methodology used. Although the present study is basically theory-neutral with respect to syntax, it does make certain assumptions, most of which are, I believe, uncontroversial. First, we distinguish between verb-first (V/1), as in 4, and verb-second (V/2), as in 5, declarative clauses. That is, the finite verb is always construed as being in the same position, although the initial position, XP, may be filled or not:

- (4) 0 hot a hintl gebilt.  
       0 has a puppy barked  
       'A puppy barked.' (139)

Second, three possible positions are distinguished for the subject: XP position, or 'Initial Field', as in 6, the position immediately after the finite verb, or 'Middle Field', as in 7, or at the end of the VP, or 'Final Field', as in 12. There are two qualifications, however. First, between the finite verb and a non-pronominal subject in Middle Field may intervene the reflexive *zikh*, object pronouns, discourse particles, and/or PPs with pronominal NPs, as shown in 8-11. Second, following the subject in Final Field may be extraposed PPs and Ss, as shown in 13-14:

Subject in Initial Field:

- (6) [[a porets] [LAKHT][tsvey mol]].  
a landowner laughs two times (1)

Subject in Middle Field:

- (7) [[eyn mol][HOT][er][zikh tsugekrogn tsu a bisl gelt]]  
one time has he REFL acquired PRT a little money  
'Once he got himself a little money...' (113)
- (8) [[dervayl] [HOBN zikh][di mentshn in hoyz][gekhaft]]  
meanwhile have REFL the people in house grabbed  
'Meanwhile, the people in the house realized....' (148)
- (9) [[eynmol][HOT im][der alter][gezogt...]]  
once has him the old said  
'Once the old man told him...' (15)
- (10) [[azelkhe toyre][KEN dokh][afile mayn balegole][fartaytshn]]  
such Torah can PRT even my wagonman translate  
'Such Scripture even my driver can translate!' (222)
- (11) [[[GIT oyf im][der balebos][a kuk]][un zogt...]]  
gives on him the boss a look and says...  
'The boss takes a look at him and says...' (54)

Subject in Final Field:

- (12) [[in a shtetl][HOBN][gelebt][an alte por-folk]]  
in a village have lived an old pair-folk  
'In a village lived an old couple.' (104)
- (13) [[der vayb][KRIKHN][[aroys][di oygn]][fun kop]][far yisurim]]  
the wife crawl out the eyes from head for troubles  
'The wife is going out of her mind from her troubles.' (225)
- (14) [[tsu eynem a yidn a balebos][ZENEN][[amol gekumen]  
to one a Jew a boss are once come  
[tsvey yidn]][betn a nedove far an oremer kale]]  
two Jews ask a alms for a poor bride  
'To this one elder came once two Jews to ask for alms for a poor bride.' (166)

It is subjects in Final Field that I am calling 'Postposed' and that are the object of investigation in this paper.

The corpus for the present study consists of the 9066 clauses which constitute the 1947 Schocken Books publication of Olsvanger's *Royte pomerantsn*, a compilation of 249 Yiddish anecdotes printed in Roman alphabet transliteration.<sup>[2]</sup> Each clause was coded for about 15 variables, including syntactic type (e.g. main, adjunct, relative), position of subject, occupant of Initial Field, polarity, agreement, morphology and syntax of subject, definiteness of subject, and so on. The corpus was then restricted to just main declarative clauses, so as not to complicate matters with perhaps extraneous issues. Then, a number of

further restrictions were made. First, since one goal is to determine when a speaker/writer exercises the option to postpone a subject, we must look at only those cases which in fact have an overt postposable subjects, i.e. where the option in fact exists. Thus clauses with no overt subject (due to Pro-drop or conjunction) were eliminated, and, since, as noted above, pronominal subjects are not postposable, all clauses containing them were eliminated from the corpus. Second, if we wish to explicate Postposing, we have to know if a subject is in fact Postposed; thus all clauses like 15, which are ambiguous as to whether the subject is in Middle Field or Postposed, were eliminated:

(15) Ambiguous subject position:

[[epes in a minut finf] [KUMT] [der furman]]  
 something in a minute five comes the coachman  
 'Somehow in about five minutes the coachman comes.' (152)

This left a total of exactly 1804 clauses, distributed as shown in 16:

(16) Royte pomerantsn corpus:

Subject position:	Initial	Middle	Postposed	Total
V/1:	-	337	103	440
V/2, no ES:	900	167	205	1272
V/2, ES:	-	7	85	92
Total:	900	511	393	1804

4.0. Brief comparison with other Germanic languages.

Since cognate constructions exist in Dutch (17), German (18), Icelandic (19), Swedish (20), and the other Germanic languages, including English (21), it behooves us to check briefly what has been claimed for them:

- (17) Dutch: Er spelen twee kinderen in de tuin.  
 'There are two children playing in the park.' (Perlmutter and Zaenen 1984)
- (18) German: Es spielen zwei Kinder im Garten.  
 'There are two children playing in the garden.' (Perlmutter and Zaenen 1984)
- (19) Icelandic: Það eru mýs í baðkerinu.  
 'There are mice in the bathtub.' (Platzack 1986)
- (20) Swedish: Det arbetar många maenniskor haer.  
 'There are many people working here.' (Henningsson 1987)
- (21) English: There are certainly enough examples here.

First, note that it is not clear whether all these subjects are in fact Postposed or rather are in Middle Field. In fact, there is good reason to believe that all are in Middle Field. Second, it is widely claimed that, in most of these languages, the construction is limited to indefinite subjects.[3] Although the majority of Postposed subjects in Yiddish are in fact indefinite, a sizable minority are definite, showing that Yiddish has no Definiteness constraint, as shown in 22-25:

- (22) es klingt mit der meyd di velt. [Definite NP]  
it rings with the girl the world.  
'The whole world is fooling around with this girl.' (23)
- (23) un es loyft arayn vite. [Proper name]  
and it runs PRT Vite.  
'And Vitte runs in.' (80)
- (24) es brekht ayn der ayz. [Definite NP]  
it breaks PRT the ice  
'The ice breaks.' (144)
- (25) un es zenen bay im geven tsum seyder ale mentshn fun dorf,  
and it are by him been to-the Seder all people from town,  
un a por balebatim oykh. [Universal quantifier]  
and a few elders also.  
'And all the people from the town, and a few elders too, were  
at his place for the Seder.' (226)

Third, in Swedish and English at least, (active) transitive verbs may not occur in such sentences (Platzack 1986); interestingly, there are none in the corpus in ES-sentences with Postposed subjects, except perhaps for 26:

- (26) un es derlangt a fal arop a driter rod!  
and it serves a fall PRT a third wheel  
'And a third wheel falls off.' (154)

However, as shown by Taube, To appear, such verbal constructions as in 26 generally retain the syntactic features of the verb underlying the nominalization, here the intransitive aropfaln 'fall down', and thus 26 may in fact involve an intransitive. At the same time, there are some examples outside the corpus of (active) transitive ES-sentences with Postposed subjects, e.g. 27-28, and there are many examples outside the corpus of (active) transitive ES-sentences with Middle Field subjects, e.g. 29-30:

- (27) es vet a poyk ton undzer trot.  
it will a drum do our step.  
'Our step will make a drumroll.' (Glik, Zog nit keynmol)
- (28) es hobn breges oykh di yamen.  
it have shores also the seas  
'Even the seas have their shorelines.' (Kaczerginski, Shtiler, shtiler)
- (29) es kenen fremde mentshn mikh farnarn.  
it can strange people me entice  
'Strange people can entice me.' (Shvaib, Moyde ani)
- (30) es hot di gute mamenyu fargesn zikh aleyn.  
it has the good mama-dim. forgotten REFL alone  
'The good little mama forgot herself.' (Folklore, Dos broytele)

Finally, such sentences are disallowed in subordinate clauses in German, but are perfectly grammatical in Yiddish, as shown in 31-35:

- (31) Adjunct clause:  
oyb es volt geven in shtub a bisl bronfn, volt ikh genumen.  
if it would been in house a little booze, would I taken  
'If there were a little booze in the house, I'd have some.'  
(163)

- (32) Complement clause:  
..zet er, az es kumt on a gdud frantsoyzn.  
 ..sees he that it comes PRT a regiment French  
 '...he sees that a French regiment is arriving.' (95)
- (33) Headed relative clause:  
..a posik, in velkhn es iz geven der vort isho.  
 ..a verse in which it is been the word isho  
 '...a verse in which the word 'isho' is.' (10)
- (34) Free relative clause:  
vifl es iz geven mentshn oyfn feld  
 how-many it is been people on-the field  
 zenen oyfgetsitert gevorn...  
 are startled become...  
 'However many people there were on the field became startled...' (248)
- (35) Indirect question:  
er zol im gebn tsu farshteyn,  
 he shall him give to understand  
viazoy es vert gefirt a milkhome.  
 how it gets led a war  
 'He should explain to him how a war gets carried on.' (66)

Thus we find that, with respect to Subject-Postposing, Yiddish is far less constrained syntactically and referentially than other Germanic languages, the only possibly formal constraint being the one against the postposing of pronominal subjects.

First, note that, while ES-sentences with Postposed subjects are relatively unconstrained by formal factors, they are in fact subject to discourse constraints. Thus, such sentences, while acceptable in one context, are infelicitous in another, as shown in 36-38:

- (36) es hobn zikh amol getrofn tsvey yidn in an akhsanye.  
 it have REFL once found two Jews in an inn  
 hobn zey tsuzamengevoynt in akhsanye a teg finf.  
 have they together-lived in inn a days five  
 'Once two Jews met in an inn. They lived together for about five days.' (44)
- (37) morgn vel ikh hobn bay mir fir yidn un a goy.  
 tomorrow will I have by me four Jews and a gentile  
tsvey yidn hobn zikh amol getrofn in an akhsanye,  
 two Jews have REFL once found in an inn  
 ober di andere kenen zikh nokh nit.  
 but the others know REFL still not  
 'Tomorrow I'll have four Jews and a gentile at my place. Two Jews once met in an inn, but the others don't know one another yet.'
- (38) morgn vel ikh hobn bay mir fir yidn un a goy.  
 tomorrow will I have by me four Jews and a gentile  
#es hobn zikh amol getrofn tsvey yidn in an akhsanye,[4]  
 it have REFL once found two Jews in an inn  
 ober di andere kenen zikh nokh nit.  
 but the others know REFL still not

The infelicity of 38, in contrast to the felicity of 36-37, is clearly

not to be explained in terms of the syntactic or other sentence-level phenomena that have been claimed to be relevant for the cognate constructions in other Germanic languages, but rather, I shall argue, what is relevant to the Yiddish situation is a discourse-level phenomenon concerning the information-status of the discourse entity represented by the subject NP.

#### 5.0. ES-sentences with Postposed subjects and information-status.

##### 5.1. Cognate constructions and 'shared knowledge'.

As is well known, the information-status of a discourse entity often has a bearing on the form of the NP representing that entity and/or on the syntactic environment in which that NP may occur. Let us reconsider for a moment English or the other Germanic languages that have a Definiteness Constraint on their cognate constructions. In fact, as is well known (cf. Rando and Napoli 1978, Ziv 1981), it is not the morphological category of definiteness that is disallowed but its usual conceptual reflex--the discourse entity being assumed to be already known to the hearer. Thus, when the NP is formally definite but in fact represents an entity not presumed to be known, it may occur felicitously in THERE-sentences, as in 39-41:

- (39) There was the usual crowd at the beach.
- (40) There was the most beautiful bird in the tree.
- (41) There were the same people at both conferences.

In 39-41, although the usual crowd, the most beautiful bird, and the same people are both definite, they are in fact a new crowd, a new bird, and a new audience for the hearer, and it is this assumed newness-to-hearer, or lack of 'shared knowledge', that is required in THERE-sentences.

##### 5.2. ES-sentences with Postposed subjects and 'shared knowledge'.

In contrast, in Yiddish ES-sentences, the hearer's assumed knowledge is not relevant. In 22-25 above, for example, we find definite NP subjects that are in fact assumed to be known to the hearer: in 22, di velt 'the world', representing an entity assumed to be in everyone's general knowledge-store, and, in 23, Vitte, the Czar's minister, certainly a well-known public figure in the Eastern European Yiddish speech community in which these stories were composed. Both of these would be, following Kuno 1972, 'in the permanent registry', or 'Unused', following Prince 1981, or 'Culturally copresent', following Clark and Marshall 1981, *inter alia*. In 24, on the other hand, der ayz 'the ice', is not 'in the permanent registry' but it is assumed to be Inferred by the hearer since we were told a few lines earlier der taykh iz geven tsugefroren 'the river was frozen', from which it follows that there is ice. In 25, ale mentshn fun dorf 'all the people from the small town', we have a slightly different type of Inferred, what I have elsewhere called a 'Containing Inferred'--a discourse entity which is inferable, but the entity which triggers the inference is contained within the Containing Inferred NP itself, here dorf 'small town'. (In this story, dorf 'small town' is itself Inferred, since we are presented simply with a scene which must be taking place in a small town or village.)

##### 5.3. ES-sentences with Postposed subjects and 'topichood'.

Another phenomenon often found to be relevant to matters of word order is that of 'topichood', the notion that not all arguments of the verb are

equal, that one argument is special in that the rest of the proposition is construed as being about it (Gundel 1974, 1985, Reinhart 1981, Davison 1984, *inter alia*). However, it does not seem that topichood is relevant to ES-sentences with Postposed subjects. First, if one argues that the Postposed subject is itself the topic of its clause, that may be true, but it is not enlightening since being a topic is clearly not a sufficient condition for Postposing; consider the ban on postposing pronominal subjects, the most likely form for a topic to take. Second, if one argues that Postposing is introducing a new or subsequent topic, consider the examples in 42-45:

- (42) es iz geven a milkhome.  
 it is been a war  
 'There was a war.'  
 [And one Jewish soldier in fact went to the very front...] (67)
- (43) [...the guy/Jew-i took the package and went into the woods.  
 He-i took the knife out of the package and stuck it into his breast pocket and stood and looked all around. and suddenly, aha! There it is!]  
es kumt on a yid-j!  
 it comes on a guy/Jew-j!  
 'A guy/Jew-j is coming!'  
 [So the robber-i goes up the the guy-j and says: "Stand still, Mr. Jew!"...] (147)
- (44) [...The gentile left in his will that each of them should put 100 dollars into his grave. They carried the gentile to the gentile cemetery]  
un es zenen nokhgegangen a sakh mentshn, yidn mit goyim.  
 and it are after-gone a lot people, Jews with gentiles.  
 'and a lot of people followed, Jews and gentiles.'  
 [And the three friends...] (137)
- (45) ...makht der yid: her zikh ayn, es vet nit helfn keyn red,  
 ...makes the Jew: hear REFL in, it will not help no talk  
 '...so the guy says: listen to me, talk won't help,'  
 [I have no other choice;; pack me up my prayer shawl and phylacteries and a knife and don't talk...] (147)

Note that the Postposed subjects in 42-45 function very differently with respect to subsequent topichood. In 42, which is discourse-initial, the Postposed subject, a milkhome 'a war' introduces the scene rather than a participant in the scene or a next-topic. In contrast, the Postposed subject in 43, a yid 'a Jew/guy', does introduce a participant, in fact a protagonist, though it is not clear to me if this new protagonist is the topic of the next clause. In 44, the Postposed subject, a sakh mentshn 'a lot of people', introduces a set of participants; however, no further mention is made of them at all. And, finally, the Postposed subject in 45, keyn red 'no talk', introduces no entity at all, at least not straightforwardly, but it is certainly inferentially related to the wife's prior talking, although no discourse entity 'talk' was explicitly licensed in the prior context, and it seems related to the imperative 'don't talk' (red nit) at the end of the passage, though that imperative could hardly be a subsequent topic.

Thus it seems safe to say that, just as Postposed subjects are not sensitive to the phenomena that underlie definiteness, so are they not



related to the notion of topichood--the Postposed subject may or may not be a possible next topic, and, if it is a possible one, it may or may not be the actual next topic.

#### 5.4. ES-sentences with Postposed subjects and 'discourse history'.

The crucial feature of all definite--as well as indefinite--NPs in ES-sentences with Postposed subjects is that, while the entities they represent may or may not be known to or inferable by the hearer, while they may or may not be subsequent topics, they all follow the generalization presented in 46:

- (46) Discourse function of ES-sentences with Postposed subjects:  
Postposed subjects of ES-sentences indicate that they do not represent entities which have already been evoked in the discourse.

There are only two apparent counterexamples in this corpus to the generalization in 46, and I believe it is worth looking at them in some detail; both occur in the same story, the relevant passages of which are given in 47:

- (47) [A guy once went by an inn one evening. He left the horse and wagon-1 outside. He went in to have a bite and ordered food. He ate slowly, took a little nap with the other guests, as usual. He spent about a half hour that way in the inn. Afterward he got up to travel on. He goes out of the inn, he takes a look,]  
es iz nito der vogn un nit dos ferd1-2.  
it is not--here the wagon and not the horse-2.  
'Neither the wagon nor the horse-2 is here.  
[So he thought that among the guys in the inn was probably a thief that stole the horse and wagon-3. So he goes back into the inn and laments and screams:]  
es zol teykef vern der vogn mitn ferd1-4,  
it shall immediately become the wagon with-the horse-4,  
'The horse and wagon-4 must come back immediately,  
[because, if not, I'll do what my father did! The thief...got scared: Who knows what such a guy can do! So he quickly went out and brought back the horse and wagon-5. Afterward he went back into the inn and told the guy that]  
der vogn mitn ferd1-6 shteyen shoyn far der akhsanye.  
the wagon with-the horse-6 stand already for the inn.  
'the horse and wagon-6 are standing already in front of the inn.' (208)

In 47, two NPs representing 'the horse and wagon' occur as Postposed subjects of ES-sentences, marked 2 and 4, and neither is discourse-initial in the story. However, I believe these cease to be counterexamples if we consider the discourse structure of the passage. The first occurrence, marked 1, is in a third-person narration, addressed of course to the reader. The second occurrence, which is Postposed, is in an interior monologue of the hero--and, since, so far as we know, he has not spoken about the horse and wagon recently, it is discourse-initial in his private discussion with himself. The third occurrence is in the continuation of his interior monologue; as an object NP, its postposability is not decidable, but I would have to predict that, if it

were a subject, it could not be Postposed. The fourth occurrence is Postposed but this time it is in his public announcement back in the inn, addressed to the guests, and, in that speech event, it is discourse-initial. Next we have an interior monologue of the thief, with 'horse and wagon', in its fifth occurrence, as an object NP. And, finally, 'horse and wagon' occurs for the sixth time in the thief's response to the owner of the horse and wagon; if this is construed as a continuation of the discourse in which the fourth occurrence appears, then it should not be Postposed, and in fact it is not.

Thus it seems that the generalization is maintained that Postposed subjects of ES-sentences may not represent entities already evoked in the discourse, with the unsurprising caveat that discourses have internal structure and may themselves include sub-discourses in each of which some discourse entity may be new.

Clearly, for this constraint to be formalized, one needs a theory that keeps track of the history of entities within a discourse, e.g. Focusing (Grosz 1977, 1981, Sidner 1983) or Centering (Joshi and Weinstein 1981, Grosz, Joshi, and Weinstein 1987). Elsewhere, I am attempting to provide a formal account of ES-sentences with Postposed subjects, among other syntactic phenomena, in a Centering framework (Prince, In prep.). For the present however, I should simply like to stress that what is not needed to account for this construction is a theory of definiteness--in sharp contrast to the situation in cognate constructions in English and other Germanic languages, the Yiddish construction concerns the discourse history and not the assumed general knowledge-store of the hearer. How this came to be--whether it is represents an older Germanic state since lost in the other languages or an effect of contact with Hebrew or Slavic--is certainly a worthwhile topic for future research.[5]

Note that the discourse function in 46 predicts the one known constraint on their Postposed subjects in Yiddish, the constraint against postposing a subject pronoun, since, in the usual case, third-person subject pronouns at least refer to entities which have been evoked in the prior discourse, and, in the case of deictic third-person pronouns, as well as first- and second-person pronouns in general, the referents are treated as though they have already been evoked; note the usual destressing of all pronouns, regardless of prior explicit mention.

At the same time, the generalization in 46, that Postposed subjects of ES-sentences must not represent entities already introduced in the discourse, does not follow from any formal ban on Postposing pronouns, since full NPs may in fact be anaphoric and yet only those which are not may be Postposed. Thus it seems as though we can eliminate from the grammar any mention of the non-postposability of pronominal subjects, leaving their infelicity to follow from the more general discourse function.

Reconsidering the infelicitous 38, we see now that the problem is that the hearer is instructed by the syntactic form to establish a new set of tsvey yidn and not to look for them in the prior context, whereas in fact they are a members of a set-entity evoked in the preceding utterance. Similarly, consider 48-49:

- (48) in a shtot iz amol gekumen a tsirk mit bern,  
 in a town is once come a circus with bears,  
 mit velf, mit lempertn. mer nit, es hot gefelt a leyb.  
 with wolves, with leopards. more not, it has lacked a lion.  
 'A circus once came to town with bears, wolves, leopards.  
 The only thing, a lion was lacking.' (33)
- (49) ...a leyb hot gefelt.  
 ...a lion has lacked

In 48, we know immediately that he was simply short one lion; we do not infer that an existing lion in his circus was missing, since that would be a member of the already evoked a tsirk mit bern, mit velf, mit lempertn 'a circus with bears, with wolves, with leopards'. In contrast, if the sentence were in canonical form as in 49, both understandings would be possible. In fact, consider 50, the actual continuation of 48, vs. 51:

- (50) dos heyst, eyn leyb iz geven,  
 this calls, one lion is been,  
 'That is, there WAS one lion,'  
 [but the circus guy wanted to have two lions.] (33)
- (51)#?...es iz geven eyn leyb...  
 ...it is been one lion

#### 6.0. Related constructions.

Now let us consider the question of how much of the discourse function in 46 is attributable to the Postposing of the subject and how much is attributable to the presence of expletive ES in Initial Field. The relevant constructions are those with expletive ES in Initial Field but without Postposed subjects and those with Postposed subjects but without expletive ES.

#### 6.1. ES-sentences with Middle Field subjects.

As noted above, ES-sentences with Middle Field subjects are very rare in the corpus, there being only 7, although they are not infrequent elsewhere.[6] Most interestingly, 6 of the 7 are negative, with a negative subject, as exemplified in 52-54:

- (52) es hot keyn zakh nit geholfn.  
 it has no thing not helped  
 'Nothing helped.' (77)
- (53) es vet keyn milkhome nit zayn.  
 it will no war not be  
 'There won't be any war.' (91)
- (54) es iz dokh keyn nafkemeine nit.  
 it is PRT no difference not  
 'There's no difference.' (186)

In contrast, while negative subjects do occur Postposed in ES-sentences, as shown in 55-57, they are not particularly common, constituting 8/65 (12%) of the tokens:

- (55) ober es kumt vayer nit aroys keyn bilet.  
 but it comes further not out no ticket  
 'But again no ticket comes out.' (96)

- (56) es iz gor nito keyn naves in insterberg?  
 it is PRT not-here no news in Insterberg  
 'There is absolutely no news in Insterberg?' (139)
- (57) es geyt nit avek keyn tsvey minut.  
 it goes not away no two minute  
 'Not even two minutes pass.' (154)

The one affirmative sentence in the corpus with expletive ES and a Middle Field subject is presented, with its context, in 58:

- (58) [Man returning from visit to Germany describes to fellow villager how people ride on horseless wagons and trains and how they speak across great distances by telephone.]  
 ir farshteyt? es geyt alts azoy geshvint,  
 you understand? it goes all so quickly,  
 az me ken gor nit gloybn.  
 that one can PRT not believe  
 'You understand? Everything goes so quickly that you can't believe it.'  
 [The rabbi says: Yeah, true. It's a miracle. But I don't understand: why are they hurrying so out in the world?] (237)

It is hard to draw conclusions from such a small corpus, but it does seem safe to infer that, for Olsvanger, such ES-sentences with Middle Field subjects are highly marked and are perhaps reserved for contexts where the subject is marked as being neither an already Evoked entity nor an entity which will be referred to subsequently, a proper subset of the contexts where he uses ES-sentences with Postposed subjects.

#### 6.2. Postposed subjects without ES.

The other very relevant sentence-type to this study are those with Postposed subjects but lacking expletive ES. These may be either V/1 sentences, like 59-61, or V/2 sentences, like 62-65:

V/1, Postposed subject, no ES:

- (59) a yunge vaybl hot gehat a yingl.  
 a young wife has had a boy.  
 iz dokh geven in shtub a simkhe.  
 is PRT been in house a joyous-occasion.  
 'A young wife had a little boy. So there was a festivity in the house.'  
 [So the husband wanted to send a telegram to his mama.] (108)
- (60) amol iz geven in shtetl a groyser yaid.  
 once is been in village a big fair.  
 'In the village there was once a big fair.'  
zenen ongefoyn fun di derfer  
 are on-gone from the towns  
alerhantike goyim mit furn,  
 all-kinds gentiles with wagons,  
 'From the towns came all kinds of gentiles with wagons,'  
 [and from the villages around came merchant Jews, and the whole marketplace was so full of people that there was no room to drop a pin.] (107)

- (61) [...if the army remains voluntary, so who's telling me to go?]  
 vel ikh avade nit geyn, iz dokh nito vos moyre tsu hobn.  
 will I PRT not go, is PRT not-here what fear to have.  
 'I certainly won't go, so there's nothing to be afraid of.'  
 (91)
- V/2, Postposed subject, no ES:  
 (62) [...But he couldn't find any nanny goat, so he bought a  
 billy-goat.]  
in a tsayt arum iz gevorn in shtot a mageyfe oyf tsign.  
 in a time around is become in town a plague on she-goats.  
 'A while later there was in the town a plague on nanny-goats.'  
 [So all the nanny-goats in town dropped dead, it shouldn't  
 happen to a dog.] (55)
- (63) in peterburg oyfn gas zenen amol gegangen tsvey yidn.  
 in Peterburg on-the street are once gone two Jews.  
 'In St. Petersburg once two Jews were walking down the street.'  
 [One of them had a pass, the other not. So they're walking  
 along and chatting...] (82)
- (64) [...Why did you answer all your aunt's questions 'As/How(ever)  
 it falls/turns out'? The lad says: 'Do you understand, uncle  
 dear? It's a very simple thing.']  
bay der mumen oyfn noz iz gehongen a loksh.  
 by the aunt on-the nose is hung a noodle.  
 'On my aunt's nose was hanging a bugger.'  
 [Therefore I answered, "How(ever) it falls." If the bugger  
 falls on the ground,...] (49)
- (65) [What do you think? You're in the municipal council here?]  
do iz nit keyn myeshtshankse uprave!  
 here is not no municipal council!  
 'This is no municipal council!'  
 do iz a mokem koydesh, do kakt men oyf aykh!  
 here is a place holy, here shits one on you!  
 'This is a prayer house, here they shit on you!' (190)

Briefly, both types, V/1 and V/2, seem to share the property of ES-sentences with Postposed subjects of marking the subject as not representing entities which have already been evoked in the discourse. As before, these subjects may represent new discourse entities representing new scenes or stages, as in 59 and 62, new participants, as in 60, 63-64, or no entities at all, as in 61 and 65.

The main difference, it seems, between these types of sentences and those with ES lies in their relation with the prior context, but this relation seems attributable not to the subject or its position but to the Initial, or XP, position. First, these V/2 sentences have two main types of fillers of XP: items that refer not to the prior discourse context but to the hearer's presumed knowledge store to set the stage for what follows, as in the discourse-initial 63, and items that relate back to the prior context in certain specifiable ways, as in 62 and 64-65. (See Prince 1985, Ward 1985.) Now, V/1 sentences, or 'consecutive' sentences, as they are called, necessarily follow some other sentence, providing for it at the very least a sequent, more generally a consequent. Thus they may be thought of as having, at the discourse level, the prior context as a sort of filler for XP position, making them in fact like V/2 sentences from a discourse point of view. But then this XP position relates to the prior

context. From such a point of view, both V/1 and ES-less V/2 sentences with Postposed subjects appear to be of the same type, each marking its subject as not representing an entity already evoked in the discourse and each marking its XP constituent (or discourse-level facsimile thereof) as representing either some previously evoked entity or some (other) entity presumed to be already known to the hearer.

#### 7.0. Conclusion.

In conclusion, then, I have tried to argue that Postposing of subjects is functional, that it marks the subject as being in a certain relation to the prior context--the null relation, in fact. And I have tried to show that this seems to be true regardless of the form of the rest of the sentence, whether it has in Initial Field expletive ES, a Fronted constituent, or nothing. Interestingly, an expletive ES with a Middle Field subject seems to mark the same null relation with the prior context, in this corpus at least. Although the occurrence of such sentences is too limited to draw safe conclusions, it does seem that the presence of expletive ES and the Postposing of the subject is each sufficient to instruct the hearer that the subject does not represent an entity already evoked in the discourse. Of course, all this is based on one corpus, all the production of one individual. Whether it holds for Yiddish speakers in general obviously requires further research.

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[1] All examples followed by a number in parentheses are taken from Olsvanger 1965 (1947). The numbers correspond to the numbers of the anecdotes in that volume.

[2] This edition of Royte pomerantsn is transliterated into the Latin alphabet (Yiddish being conventionally written in the Hebrew alphabet); the Yiddish is, however, unexceptional conversational Northeastern Yiddish. The transliterated edition was used so as to be able to produce a computer file of the text by means of a Kurtz-Weill process; the file was then uploaded onto a VAX-cluster as an EMACS file, where it was coded and analyzed by TSORT. I have standardized the transliteration for the sake of consistency, but I have not standardized morphological and lexical Northeastern Yiddish features.

[3] But see Aissen 1975, Rando and Napoli 1978, Ziv 1981, Perlmutter and Zaenen 1983, and below for counterexamples to the claim that the English construction is limited to indefinites. Furthermore, it appears that German does permit certain definites in this construction; the situation is complex but it is clear that the constraints are different from those in Yiddish since German speakers find the German glosses of many of the acceptable Yiddish examples unacceptable (B. Santorini, personal communication).

[4] The symbol # indicates that the sentence is infelicitous in context.

[5] The possibility of pragmatic borrowing from Hebrew suggests itself since ES-sentences with Postposed subjects are found in the earliest Yiddish texts and are typically used as glosses/translations of Hebrew VS clauses (B. Santorini, personal communication), as in:

- (i) AMRU      KHKHMIM      es hbn gizagit unzri khkhmim  
       said-3pl sages      it have said      our sages  
       in der tseyt ds    da iz vardn gibarn abrhv...  
       in the time that PRT is become born Abraham...  
       'THE SAGES SAID [Hebrew]. Our sages said in the time that  
       Abraham was born...' (Magen Abraham (Anon.), 1624, Lublin, p.  
       2.)

The (Hebrew) capitalized material, which is paragraph-initial and set off from the rest of the (Yiddish) text by its larger size and its calligraphic form, is VS. The Yiddish text following it translates it and continues it, using a Postposed subject and expletive ES. A possible hypothesis that requires research on Medieval Hebrew and Yiddish is as

follows. Perhaps Biblical Hebrew, known to be VSO, categorically topicalized subjects that were already evoked in the discourse. This would entail that postverbal subjects were not already evoked in the discourse. Perhaps then medieval Yiddish speakers, in close contact with Hebrew, associated this information-status of subjects with this position and imported this association into Yiddish. However, Yiddish being a V/2 language, something was needed to fill Initial Field, and expletive ES, already used for this purpose for existentials and 'subjectless' sentences, was used here as well. (See Prince 1988 for a discussion of such pragmatic borrowing.)

Interestingly, later contact with Slavic in the Modern Yiddish period could have only reinforced this pragmatic association of Final Field with subjects which are new in the discourse: O. Dahl (personal communication) notes that felicitous Russian translations of the Yiddish ES-sentences with Postposed subjects cited in this paper, in the contexts given, would be VOS sentences, i.e. subject-final.

Finally, a quantitative analysis of the information-status of referring expressions in English (Prince, To appear) shows that English canonical subjects tend to represent entities that have previously been evoked in the discourse, and this tendency is statistically significant. Thus it may be that there is a universal tendency to have NPs representing discourse-new entities not occur as Initial Field subjects.

[6] At first blush, the following appears to be a seventh instance of expletive ES with a Middle Field subject:

- (i) "...vos hert zikh epes bay dir mit undzere yidelekh?"  
 ...what hears REFL PRT by you with our Jews-dim?  
 "What's happening with our little Jews in your land?"  
 makht der taytsher keyser: "yidn bay mir?  
 makes the German kaiser: "Jews by me?  
 'Says the German kaiser: "Jews in my land?"  
es lebt zikh zey bay mir gants fayn.  
 it lives REFL they by me whole fine."  
 "They live very well by me." (92)

If the underlined sentence here is an instance of expletive ES with a Middle Field subject, it is remarkable on a number of counts. First, it would be the sole instance of expletive ES with a pronominal subject, disallowed not only by the rest of the corpus but by Zaretski, Weinreich, and others, as noted above.

Second, there is the matter of agreement. In the corpus, there are a number of instances of plural subjects with singular verbs--but, with the exception of this token, only where the subject has been Postposed, as in 57 above and ii below. There are no instances of plural subjects with singular verbs when the subject is Topicalized and none but this putative instance when the subject is in Middle Field, i.e. no sentences like iii or iv:

- (ii) un in telegram iz geshtanen nor tsvey verter.  
 and in telegram is stood only two words  
 'And there were only two words in the telegram.' (109)



(iii)\*un nor tsvey verter iz geshtanen in telegram.

(iv) \*un in telegram iz nor tsvey verter geshtanen.

Finally, note that this would be the unique instance in the corpus of the subject of an ES-sentence representing an already evoked entity. Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that *i* is an instance not of expletive ES with a Middle Field subject but rather of an impersonal reflexive semantically akin to German impersonal passives, with zey bay mir constituting a kind of locative adjunct.

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