The Passive in Soviet Yiddish*

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1. Introduction

Between World War I and II, Soviet linguists and policy makers paid considerable attention to the development of Soviet national languages. Some of the discusions and standardization recommendations centered around the acceptance and rejection of stylistic and grammatical features such as nominalization (Peškovskij 1925; Shtif 1927e; Shtif 1927f), and co-ordination or subordination of clauses (Shtif 1930), all of which were chosen to improve the written language and free it from 'non-native' influences.

Current research has predominantly focused on lexical purism and orthographic revisions. Attempts of Soviet Yiddish linguists to influence the grammatical, and thus stylistic structures in Yiddish have till now been neglected. This article will examine the debates regarding the use of the passive voice in Soviet Yiddish and the role of the Yiddish linguist, Nokhem Shtif,[1] in these debates. Although these debates centered by and large on the style used in Soviet newspapers, linguists like Shtif expressed the concern that these styles might spread to the literary language. A close look at the passive voice provides us with one of several possible lenses helping to illuminate the political and linguistic climate in the interwar Soviet society during a short period of time. I will deal primarily with the role of the passive voice in the Yiddish language. The way it was treated in its co-territorial language, Ukrainian, will constitute a minor part of this analysis.

The fundamental problem in the discussion of the passive lies in the fact that the passive voice has received very little attention in Yiddish grammars and textbooks. On the one hand, there is a general consensus on how to form the passive voice in Yiddish. On the other hand, grammars and textbooks generally avoid making stylistic judgments. Even today, normative textbooks like U. Weinreich's *College Yiddish*

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1 Nokhem Shtif was one of the founders of the YIVO (*yidisher visnshaftlekher institut*) in 1925 which was located in Vilna (then part of Poland). In Poland, he was one of the leaders of the *Folkspartey,* a Yiddishist party which promoted cultural autonomy for Eastern European Jewry. In 1922, Shtif left for Berlin where he continued his career as a Yiddishist writer. In 1927, he accepted the position as head of the Philological Sector of the Institute for Jewish/Yiddish Proletarian Culture at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in 1927. Like many other Yiddish intellectuals he was drawn back to the Soviet Union because it offered state-supported opportunities for Yiddish activists and supported the flourishing of Yiddish secular culture. He apparently hoped to continue his Yiddishist/nation-building activities, but was at odds with the internationalist orientation of Soviet policies.

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(Weinreich 1990) tend to ignore the passive voice entirely. By omitting that voice, no questions arise on its stylistic function in the language and this rather disparaged feature goes unmentioned even in the teaching of the language. Nokhem Shtif, the most outspoken critic of the Yiddish passive in the Soviet Union, based his entire objection to the use of the passive on stylistic and extra-linguistic criteria, i. e. on what supposedly sounded better, was less complicated, and more effective in conveying the speaker's intent. Discussion of the actual grammatical and stylistic functions of the passive were completely ignored in those other studies.

2. Formation of the Passive in Yiddish

The Yiddish language forms its passive voice in the same way German does. The transitive verb of the active voice is changed into a construction, consisting of a past participle and the auxiliary *vern* 'to become': for instance, *shraybn* 'to write' — *geshribn vern* 'to be written', *vert geshribn* 'is written' in the present tense, *iz geshribn gevorn* 'was written' in the past, and *vet geshribn vern* 'will be written' in the future (see also Hall 1967: 30, 129–137).[2]

The apparent passive construction (Hall 1967: 130) using the auxiliary *zayn* 'to be' emphasizes the result of the passive process: *shraybn — geshribn zayn* 'to be written'; *iz geshribn* 'is written' in the present tense, but in the past it conflates with the past of the *vern*-construction: *iz geshribn gevorn*/*iz gevorn geshribn*.

According to Mieses, the passive voice is primarily a feature of the Germanic component, i.e.

> Hebräische und slawische Worte werden auch passivistisch gebraucht, aber ziemlich selten, meist durch Anhängung eines Präfixes. Hebräische Passivformen kommen im jd. in den allerseltensten Fällen vor (mykyjm wejrn, nyssgaly wejrn). Die Verben der VI. Klasse haben im Jd. bloß eine aktive Seite (Mieses 1924: 169).[3]

As a result, the subject and direct object of the active clause change their functions. Whereas the logical and grammatical subject are identical in the active, the direct

2 One of the few Western grammarians to deal with the Yiddish passive is Matthias Mieses (1924: 169–170, 177–178, 180). Although not always a very reliable source, Mieses expands his description of the passive by including other tenses and moders like the pluperfect, future II, conditional, and imperative forms, that have generally not been included in standard reference works on Yiddish (Mieses 1924: 170).

3 In this quote, Mieses addressed the use of passive constructions derived from Hebrew participles and the auxiliary verb *vern* 'to become', such as a) *nisgale vern* 'to be revealed', b) *mekuyem vern* 'to be fulfilled', c) *nelm vern* 'to disappear'. This type belongs to a group of periphrastic verbs characteristic for Jewish languages which consist of an invariable Hebrew-Aramaic form and of the auxiliary verbs *hobn, zayn*, or *vern*, e. g. : *kharote hobn* 'to regret', *maskim zayn* 'to agree', or *poter vern* 'to get rid of'. In terms of the passive periphrastic verbs, mentioned by Mieses, we see forms derived from a) a Hebrew nitpael form (reflexive and passive), b) a Hebrew pual (passive of piel), and c) a Hebrew nifal (passive of kal). However, these forms are considered to be lexicalized constructions, as they do not involve a restructuring of the sentence. As such, they did not become a focus in any of the debates about the passive. Instead, they became potential targets in the concurrent dehebraization controversies in the Soviet Union to rid Yiddish of elements, perceived to belong to the language of the class-enemy. (Peltz 1985, Estraikh 1999: 68–70).

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object of the active clause becomes the grammatical subject of the passive. The active (logical) subject can only occur in a prepositional phrase with the prepositions *durkh* 'through' and *fun* 'of', e.g.

(1) (a) Active: *Der man shraybt a briv.*
Subj. Pred. Dir. Obj.
The man writes/is writing a letter.

(b) Passive: *A briv vert geshribn funem man.*
Sub. Pred. Prep.Phrase
A letter is (being) written by the man.

(c) *Der briv iz geshribn.*
Subj. Pred.
The letter is written.

Besides these true passive constructions, the Yiddish language very often uses two other ways of avoiding a true passive: a) the reflexive medio-passive with the reflexive pronoun *zikh* which is of Slavic origin (see ex. 2). Unlike Slavic constructions, however, Yiddish generally omits the agent of the process. The second form, b) the impersonal, yet active construction with the pronoun *me(n)* 'one', 'they' which is similar to German *man*, or akin to impersonal constructions in Slavic which use the third person plural (see ex. 3 and section 4.3 below for Nokhem Shtif's discussion).

(2) *Me farkoyft dos in ot der krom.*
The book is (being) sold in this store.
They sell the book in this store.

(3) *Dos bukh farkoyft zikh in ot der krom.*
The book is (being) sold in this store.

Generally, the true passive constructions are less favored in Yiddish than the other two, and we have to see the discussions of Soviet Yiddish scholars in this light. Hall (1967: 131), however, points out that

> the true passive [...] must be used in dependent sentences and relative clauses made from them when the intention is to focus on the object of the kernel into first position and also in those cases where it is desired to retain the agent. (see also Mark 1978: 286–287).

3. Soviet Yiddish publications

3.1 Grammars

Soviet Yiddish grammars of the interwar period (Zaretski 1926: 82–83; Falkovitsh 1940: 199–200) take a very descriptive approach to the passive voice, outlining solely

how to form passive constructions. Zaretski (1926: 83 #168,3), however, included recent innovations in the usage and formation of the passive voice, where active periphrastic constructions are changed into passive ones, e.g. *goyver zayn* 'to overcome' > *goyver vern* 'to be overcome'.

> S' merkn zikh pruvn tsu shafn a pasiv tsu di perifrastishe verbn I klas: "es muz lesof goyver vern der kinstlerisher asketizm"
> ['one notices attempts to create passive from the periphrastic verbs of the class I: "The ascetism in the arts must finally be overcome"'].

After World War II, the Moscow Yiddish linguist, Elye Falkovitsh, published two grammatical sketches of Yiddish, one in a monograph on Soviet national languages (1966) and the other as an appendix to a Russian-Yiddish dictionary (1984). In the latter work, Falkovitsh addresses a primarily Russian speaking audience with some knowledge of Yiddish. Here he cautions the reader that the passive occurs less frequently in Yiddish than in Russian (Falkovitsh 1984: 700).

3.2 Yiddish textbooks

For this article I have consulted seven Soviet Yiddish textbooks, published during the interwar period:

a. G. Yabrov, *Praktishe gramatik, erstherteyl*, 3rd ed., Minsk, 1927 .
b. G. Yabrov, *Praktishe gramatik: tsveyter teyl*, 2nd ed., Minsk, 1926 .
c. E. Spivak, *Yidishe shprakh*, 2 vols. Kiev, 1928 .
d. A. Zaretski, *Shprakh: arbetbukh farn ershtn kontsenter*. Moscow, 1930 .
e. A. Zaretski, *Shprakh: arbetbukh farn IV lernyor*. Moscow, 1930 .
f. Kh. Kahan, *Shprakhkentenish: I teyl*, 2nd ed., Minsk, 1931 .
g. E. Falkovitsh, *Yidish far dervaksene*. Moscow, 1936 .

Only the textbooks by Spivak (1928: 23–24) and Falkovitsh (1936: 109–113) follow the pattern of the interwar Soviet Yiddish grammars and simply teach the very basics of the passive, i.e. its *vern*- and *zayn*-constructions. Falkovitsh described differences between a *vern*- and a *zayn*-construction (e.g. between the examples 1a-c above) in more detail. However, no one addresses stylistic uses of the passive in Yiddish.

A review of Gelbman & Rodak's Yiddish grammar, published in the Moscow Yiddish daily *Der emes* 'The truth' in 1933 may help us understand this lack of attention towards the passive voice. The anonymous reviewer argues against teaching constructions that he deems too complicated to 6th or 7th graders (review of *Gramatik, 2-ter teyl. Sintaks. Lernbukh far der mitlshul. 6–7 lernyor*. A. Gelbman & Y. Rodak. Ukrnatsmindfarlag 1933: 3). Although the reviewer does not specifically point out the passive, he brings one example about subordinate clauses where the main clause is in the passive:

> Punkt azoy falsh geyen tsu di avters tsum tip bayzats "es zaynen ufgedekt gevorn di provokatsyes, afn smakh fun velkhe …" (z. 114). Di avters meynen taynen, az der doziker tip zats iz in yidish shver. In rusish, zogn zey, iz er shtark farshpreyt.

> ['the authors approach the type of subordinate clause just as wrongly: "provocations were discovered, on the basis of which …" (p. 114). The authors argue that this type of sentence is difficult in Yiddish. In Russian, they say, it is wide spread.']

Thus we might conclude that the passive was seen fit to be taught only at higher levels of the Soviet educational system. Nokhem Shtif, the head of the Philological Sector of the Institute for Jewish Proletarian Culture in Kiev, explored the passive in detail in his course on Yiddish stylistics [see section 4.3 on Shtif's position].

4. Yiddish Opposition Towards the Use of the Passive

4.1 The Folk Language as the Role Model

After the October Revolution and the Civil War, Yiddish received official recognition, but to different degrees in the Ukrainian and Belorussian Republics. As a result, Yiddish linguists attempted to define a language that was both independent from previously dominant languages, and also to develop it into a full-fledged modern language. For Yiddish, the move away from Russian emulated the treatment of Ukrainian and Belorussian in the 1920s which served as role models for the standardization of Yiddish.

In the 1920s, Russian was still too closely associated with the Russifying policies of the former Czarist empire, and Soviet policies supported the development of national cultures and languages (*korenizacija* 'going back to the roots'). Rhetorical descriptions of the folk language abounded which praised the *folks-shprakh* ('folk language'), the language of the *shtetl* 'small Jewish town', as pure and untainted from influences of the class enemy. Soviet linguists associated the folk language with the language of the proletariat, the peasants and workers. Under these circumstances, they believed, this language variety could help restore the corrupted bourgeois languages to a standard that was seen fit for a Soviet society. Shtif's preference for the folk language as a model for creating a standard Yiddish literary language certainly has to be seen in this light. Since the passive was unknown in the folk language, Shtif concluded that there was no place for it in the written language either. The spoken language became the standard measure of acceptability in Shtif's articles. In his discussion of the passive, Shtif writes: 'azoy ken men shraybn (vos shraybt men nit?), ober *zogn* ken men nit.' ['one can write this, (what does one not write?), but one cannot *say* it.'] (Shtif 1930: 42). This echoes his statements on nominalization in Yiddish where he wrote:

> Dem untersheyd in dem efekt, in der oysdruk-kraft tsvishn di tsvey redaktsyes ken men tsumbestn derfiln, ven di tsvey zatsn zol men *zogn* (un hern), nit shraybn (un leyenen mit di oygn) (Shtif 1930: 97).
> ['One can feel best the difference in the effect, in the expressiveness between the two versions, if one *pronounces* (and hears) the two sentences, and if one does not write (or read [them] with the eyes).']

It is important to recognize that the folk language was a highly idealized and very

abstract concept at this time. The folk language was to become the norm of a new standard Yiddish language, yet poorly-educated *arbkorn* 'worker correspondents', *kustkorn* 'artisan correspondents', *dorfkorn* 'village correspondents' (Shtif 1930: 6) submitted articles to the newspapers and had them published. During the first year of its existence, the Yiddish journal, *Di Yidishe Shprakh* 'The Yiddish language', published a number of articles railing against the low quality of the Yiddish newspaper style (S[htif] 1927d; S[htif] 1927c; Slutski 1927; Vinokur 1929; Hladkyj 1928), and especially against those written by *arbkorn* ['worker correspondents']. The Moscow Yiddish linguist, Falkovitsh, for example, complained that the written language (and the newspaper language in particular) displayed almost twice the number of passive forms as active ones (Falkovitsh 1928: 21). Yiddish linguists, then, were faced with a dilemma on how to reconcile the reality of 'poor' writing with the abstract ideal of the folk language. This was achieved by including the works of the classic writers (Sholem Aleichem, Y. L. Peretz, and Mendele Moykher Sforim) into the *folks-shprakh*. Thus, by combining the resources of the folk-language and the 'refining tools' of the literary language, language planners would be able to create a new standard language (see also Zaretski 1930c).[4]

To support his opposition to the passive voice, Shtif drew on classic Yiddish literature which contained little use of the passive (Shtif 1927a: 23), as evidence for his case against the passive voice.

4.2 Ukrainian Parallels

Shtif's rejection of the passive can be looked at in the context of the general ideological teachings in the Soviet Union at that time. His criticism, for example, echoed that of his Ukrainian colleagues (Kurylo 1920; Kurylo 1960; Hladkyj 1928). As proof of their point, both linguists stressed the absence of the passive in the spoken language. They viewed the passive voice solely as the product of Russian influence on Ukrainian, i. e. a non-native feature which had been introduced into their pure language, Ukrainian (Kurylo 1920: 17; Hladkyj 1928: 49). Hladkyj (1928: 57), for instance, argued that the passive was 'not natural' for Ukrainian:

> [T]reba pam'jataty, ščo pasyvni konstrukciji z orudnym dijevoji osoby, zaleznym vid pasyvnoho prysudka, — ne vlastyvi ukrajins'kij movi. Ukrajins'ka mova vzyvaje tut abo aktyvnoji konstrukciji z osobovym dijeslovom [...]
> ['We have to remember that the passive construction with the instrumental case, which is dependent on the passive predicate, is not natural to the Ukrainian language. Here the Ukrainian language actually uses the active construction with the personal verb.']

Russian served as the model for the increased use of the passive in Ukrainian.[5] The

4 Hosking (1990: 222) explained this phenomenon by arguing that '[i]ndeed all the great writers of the past were seen as precursors, in some sense, of socialist realism: they all had been *narodny*, or "popular, rooted in the people", they all had depicted reality, they had all reflected a progressive outlook, at least in the context of their times.'

5 To my knowledge, the use of the passive did not become a topic of discussion for the Russian language. This may be due to the fact that Russian had assumed a leadership role after which all other

Russian passive is either formed by using a reflexive verb (ex. 4b) or a passive participle in the present and past tense (exx. 5a–b). Both constructions identify the logical subject with the instrumental case:

(4) (a) Active: *Devuška moet bel'jo.*
Sub. Pred. Dir. Obj.
The girl is washing the laundry.

(b) Passive: *Bel'je moetsja devuškoj.*
Subj. Pred.Refl.Obj. (instr.case)
The laundry is being washed by the girl. (Tauscher & Kirschbaum 1980: 277)

(5) (a) Pass.Part.Pres.: berega, omyvaemye rekoj
Subj.pl. Part.Nom.pl. Obj. (Instr.)
The banks, washed by the river

(b) Pass.Part.Pret.: *kniga, zabytaja vami.*
Subj. Part.Nom.sg. Obj.(Instr.)
the book, forgotten by you (Tauscher & Kirschbaum 1980: 330–331)

The passive participles in Russian have exerted a strong influence on Ukrainian and Yiddish. Although they do not fully resemble in form Shtif's examples below (see ex. no. 8a), they are a common feature in Yiddish, especially in the written language. Synjavs'kyj's Ukrainian grammar (1923: 46) mentions a passive participle in the present and past tense (such as: , but cautions that these forms are fairly rare when used as adjectives in the Ukrainian language. However, he acknowledges as a specific Ukrainian feature the passive participle, formed from an impersonal verb, followed by an accusative (Synjavs'kyj 1923: 48). In other words, this description confirms the limited occurrence of the passive in Ukrainian, as stated by Kurylo and Hladkyj.

4.3 Nokhem Shtif's Opposition to the Passive

In the academic circles, the debates surrounding the passive centered also around Shtif's articles which were published between 1927 and 1928. Particularly in the first three issues of *Di Yidishe Shprakh* (1927), Shtif argued strongly against the use of the passive voice. The syllabus of his course, taught during the Academic Year of 1929-1930, allots five of the twenty sessions to the passive (Shtif 1929: 106403v). The fact that a quarter of all the sessions taught focussed on the passive, stresses the importance which the issue had attained by the late 1920s in general, and for Nokhem Shtif in particular.

Soviet nationality languages were to be modeled. However, the widely discussed and criticized nominalization tendencies in the Yiddish, Ukrainian, and Belorussian newspaper language found a mirror in Russian, where the Soviet purist and linguist Meromsk opposed the use of verbal nouns (Zaretski 1932: 50).

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For his course on stylistics, Shtif selected most of the readings from his own works published in the Yiddish linguistic journal *Di Yidishe Shprakh*. He also included Falkovitsh's response to Shtif (Falkovitsh 1928) and also Zaretski's normative collection, *Grayzn un sfeykes* 'Errors and doubts' (Zaretski 1927).

In addition, Shtif and his colleagues came up with some more subjective criticisms, based on the transformation of an active into a passive sentence. Shtif argued that after this transformation the logical and grammatical subject were no longer identical. As a result, this complicated grammatical construction would violate logical thinking and forces the reader/listener to transform the passive to an active one (Shtif 1927a: 13). In many cases, the agent of the active clause is omitted, since the prepositional phrase containing the agent in a passive construction is not required. Shtif argued that the entire passive sentence loses its clarity. The active construction is also shorter and more precise, especially since it does include the agent of the process.

Stylistic criteria also played a role in Shtif's rejection of the passive. Shtif saw limitations in the expressiveness of the passive. He believed that both nominalizations and the passive severely restricted the flexibility in the word order inherent in Yiddish (Shtif 1927a: 24), since they consist of nominalized predicates and the rather rigid construction of *vern + participle + prepositional phrase*. The Western Yiddish scholar, Yudel Mark, took up Shtif's argument in his Yiddish grammar, arguing against the passive voice because it created a heavy style ('shvern stil') (Mark 1978: 286).

In addition, Shtif also saw an ideological problem in the use of the passive. Promulgating the revolutionary rhetoric of the revolutionary period he lived in, Shtif argued that it would inappropriately promote or portray passivity or weakness of the new *Homo sovieticus* and the act of building a new society (Shtif 1927e: 27).[6] This was a less than convincing statement which Shtif may have made as a token gesture to appease political critics who had accused him of not having sufficiently broken with his bourgeois, Yiddishist past.

Furthermore, Shtif asked for patience in the creation of a standard Yiddish language in the first issue of *Di Yidishe Shprakh*. In this introduction Shtif remarked that the rapid changes in society did not allow linguists to refine the language at that time. The task of cleaning and refining the tool, language, should wait for a second stage in the development of society ([Shtif 1927b: 3).

Besides the so-called 'full passive constructions', Shtif addressed other passive constructions which he labeled 'semi-passive constructions' (*halbe pasive konstruktsyes*). Shtif equates them with the impersonal active constructions using the impersonal *me* 'one'.

(6)(a) Active: *Me **bashuldikt** zey in organizrn dem kamf mit der politseymakht.*
One *accuses* them of organizing the fight against the police force.

(b) Passive: *Di arestirte **vern bashuldikt** in bakumen gelt-hilf fun Mopr.*
The arrested *are accused* of receiving monetary support from Mopr

6 Slutski (1927: 78), one of Shtif's critics, accused Shtif of having copied statements from Russian linguists on passive constructions in Russian.

(Shtif 1930: 59)

Shtif considered these constructions more admissible, as both the active and the passive, lack the agent (Shtif 1930: 60–61). These semi-passive constructions do occur in the spoken language, but not very often. He argued that

> [i]n zatsn, mit a nayem ideishn gezelshaftlekhn inhalt, vos di geredte shprakh hot biz itst nit gevust fun im, klingt undz di pasive konstruktsye nit azoy shlekht vi ba zakhn, pasirungen fun dem alteglekhn lebn . … Tsumeystns trefn mir di halbe pasive konstruktsye *ba naye bagrifn, ba naye oysdrukn, naye vort-kombinatyses*, vos zaynen gebundn mitn [*sic!*] dozike bagrifn.
> ['In sentences with a new conceptual, societal content, which was not known in the spoken language until now, the passive construction does not sound as bad to us as [in sentences about] things, events of daily life. … We find the half passive construction mostly with *new concepts, new expressions, new word combinations* which are linked to these expressions.']

In his series on the passive, Shtif included also a third group of passives, the so-called 'disguised passive constructions'. They are actually nominal or adjectival constructions with a passive content, i. e. they can easily be verbalized into a 'full passive' form .

(7) (a) nominal: *es kimert im veynik* ***di oysshlakhtung fun a halbvildn sheyvet durkh a tsivilizirter regirung***
'The slaughtering of a half-wild tribe by a civilized government does not bother him.

(b) passive: *es kimert im veynik,* ***vos a halb-vilder sheyvet vet oysgeshlakht durkh a tsivilizirter regirung***
It does not bother him that *a half-wilde tribe is being slaughtered by a civilized government*.

(c) active: *es kimert im veynik,* ***vos a tsivilizirte regirung vet oysshlakhtn a halb-vilnd sheyvet***.
It does not bother him *that* a civilized government *will slaughter a half-wild tribe*. (Shtif 1930: 73)

Shtif maintained that the nominal constructions above and the adjectival ones below share some features in their structure: both are derived from the predicate and are invariable, forcing the writer/speaker into a supposedly rigid and limited style of speech. In addition, both alternatives that Shtif criticized are very common elements of Slavic languages (see exx 5a–b).

(a) adjectival: *gezelshaftn,* ***geshafene durkh di arbetndike*** *af tsu helfn der ratnmakht*.
societies, *founded by the workers* to help the Soviet power.

(b) passive: *gezelshaftn, vos **zaynen geshafn gevorn durkh di arbetndike** af tsu helfn der ratnmakht.*
societies that *were founded by the workers* to help the Soviet power.

(c) active: *gezelshaftn, vos **di arbetndike hobn geshafn** af tsu helfn der ratnmakht.*
societies *that the workers founded* to help the Soviet power.
(Shtif 1930: 75)

Given Shtif's uneasiness with nominal constructions and their similarity to the passive, he considered the use of these forms to be even more undesirable than the semi-passive ones (Shtif 1930: 70). He deplored the use of the prepositions *fun* and *durkh*, as he asserted they do nothing to help clarify the context. In short, he considered passive constructions long, unclear, and difficult.

4.4 The debates over the Yiddish passive, 1928–1937

By 1928, government policies had already shifted significantly toward a more favorable consideration of the Russian elements. The so-called *korenizacija*-policies had ended and Soviet society was moving towards becoming a more centralized state. As a result, Shtif's articles generated some negative responses in the Yiddish press (Gurshteyn 1928), which accused him of relying too heavily on the folk-language (Shtif 1928: 26). Another review condemned a Yiddish translation of *Geography of Capitalist Countries* for not using the preposition *fun*, while the translation of a zoology textbook was praised for its active style (cf. Estraikh 1999: 72).

At the academic level, Shtif met with a more favorable response. In his book on Yiddish stylistics, *Grayzn un sfeykes* 'Errors and Doubts', the Moscow linguist, Zaretski, agreed with Shtif. While he advocated the use of the passive in certain instances, he generally described the passive as being difficult and stiff. Elye Falkovitsh (1928) also replied to Shtif's articles on the passive, agreeing with most of Shtif's findings. He disagreed with Shtif on the semi-passive constructions and *vern/zayn*-constructions arguing that they should not be categorically rejected in the standard language. In his subsequent reply to Falkovitsh, Shtif (1928) agreed fully and decided in fact to make a few changes in the re-publication of his articles in the volume, *Yidishe stilistik* 'Yiddish stylistics' (Shtif 1930). However, this was an exception and for the most part Shtif intensified his opposition to the full and the hidden passives.

With the end of the *korenizacija*, even Shtif acknowledged half-heartedly the predominance of Russian over the other Soviet languages:

> "Far a muster dint far alemen di hayntike rusishe kultur-shprakh, derhoypt di rusishe prese-shprakh, un me tut dos nokh in ukrainish, ashteyger, u. and., azoy gut vi in yidish." (Shtif 1930: 7)
> ['The current Russian language serves as a pattern for all, [and] the Russian newspaper-language in particular, and this is also done in Ukrainian, for example, a. o., as well as in Yiddish']

Half-heartedly, because in the following lines, he pitches grammatical patterns against style and finishes his introduction with the note that his article on the passive contains only minor changes from its original publication in 1927.

The All-Union Yiddish language conference (Kiev, February 1931) reflects these policy changes, and Shtif became the target of criticism, nonetheless. His writings on the teaching of grammar, on the use of verbal nouns and on the passive were attacked. One of the participants at the conference, Kamenshteyn, accused Shtif of a mechanistic approach to language by equating the passive with passivity (Ovntike zitsung 1931: 110879v). Kamenshteyn considered this to be an overly simplistic approach in the style of western methodology.

After Stalin had announced the new slogan of the Soviet nationality policies: "national in form, socialist in content," *korenizacija* as the former symbol of national (or some kind of political) independence from Moscow, was re-interpreted and became highly politicized. The discussions of the *korenizacija*-period regarding the development of Ukrainian were now considered sabotage, if we consider Horec'kyj & Kyryčenko's discussion in their article: 'National sabotage in the syntax of the modern Ukrainian literary language' (Horec'kyj & Kyryčenko 1934). The Ukrainian linguistic journal *Movoznavstvo* 'Linguistics' became the platform for these accusations where numerous articles blacklist the works and authors, like O. Kurylo, M. Hladkyj, E. Tymčenko, who promoted the Ukrainian language revival after the Civil War (Horec'kyj *et al.* 1934: 41–42).

By acknowledging and accepting the Russian influence on minority languages, a new message was publicized. It stressed the rapprochement of the Soviet nationalities and of Soviet nationality languages. It also marked the emergence of a new culture, as the use of the term 'cultural language' might indicate. The discussion about the passive changed as well over time, to the same degree as the passive voice developed more into an ideological symbol. The focus on the newspaper language and style faded more and more. The symbolic value of relations with Moscow and the Soviet power gained prominence in the debates.

It is not very surprising that a topic like the passive voice became politicized and turned into an ideological symbol. Any criticism of the passive voice may have been an attack (inadvertent perhaps) not only the grammatical structure of the language, but on the message of the text itself. According to Hodge & Kress (1993: 134), the agentless state of the passive 'creates an impression of objectivity through the impersonality of the language.' We have to be aware that newspapers fulfill a very political and ideological function in society, reporting and announcing political events. And I believe that any criticism of the newspaper style also signifies, intentionally or not, a criticism of that particular message in the newspaper. Hodge & Kress (1993), for instance, illustrate this by providing examples on how the use of passives and verbal nouns in the British press serves as a way to convey or obscure certain messages.

Shtif (1927b) supports this point of view by emphasizing the importance of the newspaper language as the *real cultural language*. The language of the newspapers became part of the three styles of Yiddish where we find (a) the folk language, (b) 'the highly cultivated language of new fiction, which is based on the folk language', and (c) 'the real cultural language that is most of all expressed in the press' (see also Peltz

& Kiel (1985: 285)).

By 1932, the political climate had changed even more drastically and extra-linguistic influences on Yiddish scholars become even more apparent. Yiddish linguists (Shtif in particular) presented confession-like statements of self-criticism, renouncing their mistakes and revising their stance. An entire volume of the journal, *Afn shprakhfront* 'On the language front', was dedicated to that session of self-criticism, something we do not see in the Ukrainian linguistic journals of that period. However, Shtif hesitated in admitting his mistakes. He stated that the use of the passive had decreased in the press, emphasizing the success of his work and the better training of workers-correspondents. Shtif conceded only that the passive had some function in Yiddish, in cases where the logical object was to be stressed. Nonetheless, he still did not know what to do with the full passive construction ('ken zikh nit keyn eytse gebn'). His respondents, Zaretski, Hurvits, and Spivak, however, reproached him for that lack of insight in his self-criticism. In response to Shtif's revision (1932), for instance, Hurvits et al. (1932: 45). argued that Shtif's attitudes clearly mirrored the deviant Ukrainian movement; a point which Shtif adamantly refuted.

The discussion subsided gradually after Shtif's death in 1933. A book, that was initially planned as a Festschrift, became instead a volume criticizing Shtif and his attempts as a former émigré to adjust to Soviet society. It was published in 1934 and marked the culmination in the discussion of the passive and other grammatical features (*Afn Shprakhfront 2 (1934)).*

Altogether the fate of the passive, i.e. its acceptance had been decided with the emergence of Marrism as the dominant theory and the positive stance towards Russian influence. In discussing Shtif's attitudes towards the Yiddish language, Gurevitsh (1934: 30–31) took a very pro-Russian view in this issue and linked the passive voice to the dominant theory of that period, Marrism. Marr and his colleagues, like Byxovskaja in her article on the passive in Japhetic languages, had determined that the passive had a place in language (Byxovskaja 1934). In addition, Gurevitsh argued that by emphasizing the outcome of a process, the passive would fit very well into the active, belligerent period of Soviet society (Dobin 1934: 57; Gurevitsh 1934: 32). The argument regarding the admissability of grammatical features into a language followed the same vein. It was previously argued that if the folk language did not possess a certain feature, it should not be introduced. Now it was reversed: if a certain feature was not present, it was a sign that the language was primitive. Russian would provide the source of enrichment for any given language, turning it into a cultural language. The term 'cultural language' was increasingly applied to describe the standard language, symbolizing the achievements of the new proletarian culture. Zaretski (1935: 187) echoed this approach by demanding that one should point out and explain the rapprochement of Yiddish syntax to other languages (e. g. Russian).

By 1937, interest in the passive voice had already faded. Zaretski lists the passive in passing. As a grammarian, he does not make any stylistic judgments and does not even point out that the sample sentences are active or passive. Instead he concentrates on the function of the subject in the active and passive sentence, stressing the change of focus in the sentence:

> Heyst es, oyb yeder substantiv in zats iz a teme fun der miteylung, iz ober der subyekt di tsentrale teme, beys andere substantivn zaynen baytemes.
> "Tsezar hot bazigt Pompeyen" gehert tsu Tsezars byografye, "Pompey iz bazigt gevorn durkh Tsezarn" gehert tsu Pompeys byografye." (Zaretski 1937: 51).
> ['This means, if each noun in a sentence is a theme of a message, then the subject is the central theme, whereas the other nouns are secondary themes.
> "Caesar defeated Pompei" belongs to Caesar's biography, "Pompei was defeated by Caesar" belongs to Pompei's biography'].

Only in one instance, Zaretski (1937: 51) takes a stand and emphasizes the stylistic elegance of an agentless passive construction over one with an agent:

> Di boyung vert fargikhert.
> (frg. Mir heybn on boyen gikher — s'iz di primitivere forme onshtot der konstruktsye mitn verbaln substantiv).
> ['The construction is being accelerated.
> (cf. We are starting to build faster — this is the more primitive form instead of the construction with a verbal noun)']

Zaretski's rather descriptive approach marked the end of the debates surrounding the passive. It was also the period when the number of Yiddish linguistic publications began to decline slowly. Roznfeld (1938) referred in passing to the passive in his article on nominalization. Although he favored the nominal construction (which Shtif had strongly opposed), he was critical of the passive. In fact, Roznfeld saw the use of verbal nouns as a good way to avoid the passive (Roznfeld 1938: 207). Although published in 1938, this article had originally been written or submitted in 1934. Its late publication may just have been an attempt to reconnect the declining Yiddish scholarship to its more productive earlier years. The climate for the discussion of these topics may have also become more favorable. Roznfeld's article was one of the last to appear in major Yiddish linguistic collections.

As to Shtif's former supporters and critics: Falkovitsh no longer discussed the passive anymore and limited his research to grammar, lexicology, and teaching Yiddish in school. By 1932, Zaretski had already changed his views on the passive, when he strongly disagreed with Shtif's self-criticism. Like Falkovitsh, he continued his research work in the less controversial areas of grammar and terminology. The down-sizing and closing of Soviet Yiddish research institutions from the mid-1930s onwards caused a decline in Yiddish research. Normativism in Yiddish and the creation of a standard language became increasingly unimportant goals and issues and the treatment of the passive and other grammatical features were left undecided.

5. The Passive Outside the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences

5.1 The Passive in the School System

So far I have only treated the discussion of the passive in academic circles, and I believe that it did not go beyond this sphere. A secular Yiddish school system was not established in Eastern Europe until World War I, and competent teachers with a

good knowledge of Yiddish were hard to find in the 1920s. The task of creating terminologies to be used in the class room was far more pressing than more sophisticated and stylistic questions like the use of the passive. As the example from Yiddish textbooks already indicates, the passive was simply not considered to have much importance in daily life of Soviet Jews. Alternatives to the passive, i.e. impersonal constructions and reflexive verbs, were, on the other hand, easy to teach and were the recommended substitute in the Soviet Union as well as in the West. With the exception of the Jewish Autonomous Region Birobidzhan in Siberia, the Yiddish school system was disbanded in the Soviet Union by 1938 and there was no more need to deal with stylistic intricacies.

5.2 The passive in the Moscow Yiddish daily Der emes and Der Nister's Mishpokhe Mashber

A comprehensive and comparative study of Soviet Yiddish newspapers would go beyond the scope of this article. Instead I did a cursory reading of the title pages of the Yiddish daily newspaper *Der emes* ['The truth'] between 1923 and 1935. These twelve years encompass the most important time in the discussion of the passive voice, covering the period from before and after the debates on the passive. This survey is one example of a general trend: the changing attitudes towards the passive.

Two characteristics of the title page in *Der emes* need to be considered for the analysis.

Firstly, the title pages generally consist of longer reports of domestics news, usually identifying the author. The other part of the page consists of short, anonymous news items covering foreign events.

Secondly, there is a correlation between the subject matter of the articles and the use of the passive or active voice. Conferences, party meetings, etc. generate a far more active reporting than, for instance, the persecution of communists abroad where the use of the passive dominates. One reason for this discrepancy might lie in the fact that, on the one hand, they stress the active role of the committees and thus demand a more frequent use of the passive voice. On the other hand, Yiddish journalists, presumable the editor Moyshe Litvakov, wrote these editorials in Yiddish. In the 1920s, Litvakov 'continued to dream about a highbrow and, at the same time, ideologically loaded literature for a sophisticated reading audience' (Estraikh 2005: 115) which might explain the different style of the editorials.

The news items seem to be simple reports that news agencies might distribute and that seem to have been later translated into Yiddish, most likely from Russian. The example of the persecuted communists outside of the Soviet Union highlights their role as victims, and thus it triggers a greater use of the passive form.

The title page of the April 15, 1923 issue contains altogether 50 passive constructions, while the editorial column (140 lines) uses it only six times. One 26 line article on Prussian policies uses the passive no less than eight times. Three years later, the frequency is cut almost in half. The title page from April 27, 1926, contains about 26 passives. By 1930, the number of passives has decreased even further for June 3 where hardly any passive occurred. Ultimately, we note a decrease, but not a complete disappearance of the passive voice in Soviet Yiddish publications. However, we can notice the frequent use of reflexive verbs.

Soviet Yiddish literature does not shun the passive at all. In fact, it fulfills specific stylistic functions. The Soviet Yiddish writer, Der Nister, for example, uses the passive voice and its alternatives very skillfully in his novel *Mishpokhe Mashber* ['Family Mashber'] (Der Nister 1943) when he describes the various social strata and circles of the city of N. We can summarize his use of various passive constructions according to Shtif's definition as follows:

The pronoun *me* has definitely established its place in the literary works fulfilling a number of functions:

a. it replaces the full passive;
b. it expresses habituality, crowd scenes, objectivity or abstraction;
c. it can act as a substitute for the personal pronoun;
d. it can express action.

The passive with *zayn*, on the other hand, expresses stability and dominate in descriptive passages of fiction. We can see this in Der Nister's work and the passive with *zayn* is also a very prominent feature in Bergelson's work.

The full passive with *vern* occurs infrequently in the texts analyzed and generally served (a) to express power relationships or (b) to maintain the structure of a given passage so that the same subject of the sentence can be used throughout the passage.

Der Nister, Dovid Bergelson, and also Moyshe Kulbak seem to have consciously used the respective constructions, since they occur in very specific passages. Shtif did not acknowledge this fact in his writings and focused instead on other genres of writing.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the debates surrounding the passive showed us some very interesting themes in the periods of Soviet language planning. First, there is the discrepancy between the theory and the practical application of standards which had been a point of contention in Soviet Yiddish linguistics. Yiddish grammars and textbooks were apparently unaffected by these debates. At most they limited their discussion of the passive to basic, and thus safe descriptions of its formation.

Secondly, the debates illustrated the ideological significance of language standardization on several levels: (a) the relationship between national policies and language standardization where changes in the general policies affected guidelines for the standard; (b) the difficulties of dealing with the newspaper language, which by its content and function was already highly politicized and ideological.

Thirdly, the problem of defining what constitutes a standard language had been accentuated in this debate where three styles, (a) the folk or spoken language, (b) the written or literary language, and (c) the newspaper language, were competing for adequate representation in the final standard language.

With regard to the Yiddish and Ukrainian languages as shown by the debates over the use of the passive voice, we can detect different standards that were applied in the treatment of these two nationality languages.

In the 1930s, the debates surrounding the Yiddish passive voice faded and the issues surrounding the passive voice were rarely raised in later linguistic works. On the one hand, the Yiddish researchers were left relatively unharmed during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. However, in 1932, Yiddish linguists also engaged in

self-criticism, in 1934 Ukrainian party officials warned the participants of an All-Union Yiddish conference to follow the Ukrainian path (Xvylja 1935, Zatons'kyj 1935). Consequently, the focus shifted to less controversial topics and languages.

The Ukrainian linguists, on the other hand, were accused of sabotage and the Ukrainian Institute of Linguistics became the target of repeated purges to eliminate so-called 'class enemies'. Obviously, the authorities did not target Yiddish speakers and researchers to this kind of harassment or purges because the authorities considered them a lesser threat to Soviet society. Unlike the Ukrainians, Soviet Jews belonged to a group of Soviet nationalities who were not fortunate enough to possess their own territory.

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