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Nominal possessive constructions in the early modern Hasidic Hebrew tale*

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Abstract
This paper constitutes the first linguistic analysis of nominal possessive constructions in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hasidic Hebrew hagiographic tales. Such analysis is necessary because it sheds much-needed light on the grammatical structure of this prominent but largely unstudied early modern Eastern European form of Hebrew. Hasidic Hebrew possessive constructions exhibit a variety of noteworthy features, namely non-standard uses of the construct chain including definiteness of the construct noun, double definiteness, and split construct chains; construct chains with adjectives in the absolute position; the productiveness and widespread use of the construct chain; the tendency to favour the post-Biblical Hebrew possessive particle שֶׁל *shel* only in certain syntactic contexts; and the employment of the Aramaic particle -ד *de-* specifically to express geographical and temporal relationships. These phenomena reflect a mix of various strata of Hebrew as well as Aramaic, Yiddish, and independent elements that combine to form a unique system distinct from other varieties of Hebrew.
Keywords: Hebrew, Hasidic, Possession, Eastern Europe, Morphosyntax

1. Introduction

This paper constitutes the first analysis of the nominal possessive constructions employed in the early modern Hasidic Hebrew tale corpus, a large body of narrative literature composed between 1864 and 1914 by Eastern European Jewish followers of the Hasidic spiritual movement. These tales are predominantly hagiographic works celebrating the lives and works of the rebbes, or Hasidic spiritual leaders. They are the direct literary and linguistic heirs of the only two earlier collections of Hasidic Hebrew tales, *Shivḥe haBesht* (*In Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov*), a compilation of legends relating to the founder of Hasidism and his circle of associates first published in 1814, and the allegorical *Sippure Ma'aśiyot* (*The Tales of Naḥman of Braslav*), published in 1815. Most of the Hasidic tales probably derive from stories that were passed down orally in Yiddish and translated into Hebrew only when committed to writing (Dvir-Goldberg 2003: 19). The authors were all native Yiddish speakers who

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were schooled from an early age in written and recited Biblical and post-Biblical forms of Hebrew and were also trained in a range of Aramaic-language texts.

The tales provide an unparalleled linguistic insight into a crucial stage in the development of Hebrew, firstly because they constitute the sole extensive record of narrative and discursive use of the language in early modern traditional Eastern European Jewish society, and secondly because they comprise one of the chief forerunners of revernacularized Modern Hebrew. However, despite their great linguistic significance the tales have not previously been the subject of detailed grammatical analysis; instead, scholars have tended to dismiss Hasidic Hebrew with the generalization that it is merely a haphazard and substandard melange of Rabbinic Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish (see e.g. Kutscher 1982: 189 and Rabin 2000: 80, 92) unworthy of serious attention.

The present paper seeks to work towards redressing this imbalance by providing a detailed corpus-based analysis of a particular aspect of Hasidic Hebrew grammar. A study of the possessive constructions appearing in the tales is thus instructive not only because it illuminates a fascinating and previously unexamined area of the corpus' morphosyntax, but also because it clearly illustrates an important broader point about the language: while the authors do combine elements of Rabbinic Hebrew, Aramaic, and Yiddish in their writings, they do not employ them indiscriminately but rather within the framework of certain clear patterns, and likewise, although they often utilize non-standard features these should not simply be dismissed as products of grammatical ignorance but can instead more usefully be recognized as independent developments contributing to a distinctive and flourishing early modern Eastern European Hebrew idiom.

The purpose of this paper is then threefold: first, it will present the Hasidic Hebrew techniques for conveying nominal possession, namely the construct chain, the typically post-Biblical Hebrew possessive particle שׁל *shel*, and its Aramaic counterpart -ד *de-*; secondly, it will analyse the linguistic considerations behind these phenomena, pinpointing features attributable to Yiddish influence as well as those resulting from issues such as mistaken analogies and the force of attraction; and thirdly, it will illustrate how the authors' combination of these features constitutes a unique and well-evolved system best considered on its own terms. I shall illustrate these points with examples drawn from the Hasidic Hebrew tale collections of M. L. Rodkinsohn, M. M. Bodek, J. Kaidaner, F. Munk, E. Shenkel, and I. M. Bromberg.

2. The construct chain

The chief mechanism in Hasidic Hebrew for the expression of nominal possession is the construct chain, a construction comprised of two or more juxtaposed nouns. While the fact that Hasidic Hebrew authors use the construct chain is not in itself remarkable, as the construction is a feature of all earlier varieties of the language, the ways in which they employ it are striking in that they do not precisely resemble any historical form of the language. Rather, they reflect a synthesis of elements drawn from various strata of Hebrew as well as from Yiddish, in addition to certain internal developments. These points will be addressed below.

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2.1 Definiteness of construct chains

2.1.1 Definite article prefixed to construct noun

In Biblical Hebrew the standard way of making construct chains definite is by prefixing the definite article to the absolute noun, with the construct noun remaining unprefixed (see e.g. Williams 2007: 8), and this practice remained standard in subsequent forms of the language. The Hasidic Hebrew authors sometimes follow this convention, as in (1).

(1) אין כאן יהודים כ״א בני **ה**בית שלנו
*en kan yehudim k''i bene **hab**bayit shelanu*
[. . .] There are no Jews here except for the members of our household [. . .]
(Kaidaner 1875: 12b)

However, the practice shown in (1) is not the authors' sole method of making construct chains definite. Instead, on many occasions they do so by prefixing the definite article to the construct noun rather than to the absolute one, as in (2)–(5). This applies both to nouns with a distinct construct form, as in (2), and to those with identical absolute and construct forms, as in (3)–(5).

(2) ראה והבן [. . .] עד היכן הגיע **ה**יראת שמים שלו
*re'e vehaven [. . .] ad hekhan higgi'a **hay**yirat shamayim shelo*
See and understand [. . .] how far his fear of heaven reached
(Bromberg 1899: 35)

(3) ואמרו לו הבט נא בתוך **ה**ארון קודש
*ve'amru lo habbet na bettokh **ha** 'aron qodesh*
And they said to him, 'Please look inside the ark'
(Kaidaner 1875: 19b)

(4) ובהגיע אל הלילה הזה ביקש מאותו **ה**בעל מלחמה
*uvehaggi'a el hallayla hazze biqqesh me'oto **hab**ba'al milkhama*
And when that night came he asked that soldier
(Bodek 1865: 13)

(5) לתת הכסף תוך **ה**חביות יין אשר נתתי לך
*latet hakkesef tokh **ha**ḥaviyot yayin asher natatti lekha*
[. . .] to put the money into the wine barrels that I gave you [. . .]
(Shenkel 1903: 16)

This convention seems to lack precedent in Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew. By contrast, it is attested in medieval and early modern Ashkenazi Responsa literature (Betzer 2001: 91), as well as in the two formative early nineteenth-century Hasidic Hebrew tale collections *Shivḥe haBesht* and *Sippure ma'aśiyot* (Kahn 2011: 338–40), and the use of the construction in the Hasidic Hebrew corpus under examination is doubtless traceable in some measure to its appearance in these earlier writings.

However, it is most likely that the phenomenon in all of these types of literature is ultimately attributable to influence from Yiddish, which was the native language of all of the Hasidic Hebrew authors as well as many of the composers of Ashkenazi responsa. Many Hebrew construct chains, such as those appearing in (2)–(4), exist independently in Yiddish as compound nouns, and in Yiddish such nouns are made definite by placing the definite article before the first noun in the construction, i.e. **דאָס** יראת-שמים *dos yires shomayim* 'the fear of

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heaven', ארון-קודש **דער** *der orn koydesh* 'the ark', בעל-מלחמה **דער** *der bal-milkhome* 'the soldier'. The fact that the Hasidic Hebrew authors precisely replicate the Yiddish construction indicates that they (most likely subconsciously) understood these construct chains as single compound nouns, as in their native Yiddish. Their instinctive proclivity for this approach is highlighted by the fact that it is not restricted to construct chains appearing independently in Yiddish, but rather was generalized to include construct chains not actually employed in that language, such as that shown in (5). Conversely, the fact that the authors do not use this Yiddish-based construction in all cases but rather alternate it with the standard Hebrew convention shown in (1) supports the proposal that the Yiddish influence was subconscious and therefore not completely systematic.

As mentioned above, it has been traditional in scholarly circles to interpret this type of non-standard usage solely as evidence of the Hasidic Hebrew authors' grammatical ignorance. However, it is important to consider that these authors had an intimate knowledge of written and recited Hebrew instilled into them from early childhood and, moreover, that some of them had considerable education and experience with written Hebrew; for example, Rodkinsohn had a background in publishing (Meir 2008: 240–1). This consideration, combined with the extremely widespread appearance of the construction under examination, means that it need not be dismissed as a series of errors committed by writers with a shaky grasp of Hebrew but rather acknowledged as an organic development in a thriving written Eastern European idiom.

2.1.1 Doubly definite construct chains

In addition to prefixing the definite article to construct nouns, Hasidic Hebrew authors frequently make construct chains doubly definite by prefixing the definite article to both the absolute noun and the construct noun, as in (6)–(13).

(6) וישחק עוד **הבעה"ב**
vayyiśḥaq od ***hab****ba****ha****"b*
And the innkeeper laughed again

(Rodkinsohn 1865: 8)

(7) **וה**צדיקי **ה**דור הגדולים שהיו אז היו אומרים
*ve****has****ṣaddiqe* ***had****dor haggedolim shehayu az hayu omrim*
And the greatest righteous men of the generation who were [alive] then used to say…

(Bromberg 1899: 4)

(8) ולא ידע **הבעה"ג** שלו להיכן היא נוסע
velo yada ***hab****ba****ha****"g shelo lehekhan hi nose'a*
And his driver did not know where he was travelling

(Munk 1898: 49)

(9) מעשה בעיר אחת (שכחתי שמה) שהי' שם מסור אחד והציק מאד לכל אנשי העיר במסירותו ל**ה**אדון **ה**עיר
*ma'aśe be'ir aḥat (shakhaḥti shema) shehay' sham masur eḥad vehiṣṣiq me'od lekhol anshe ha'ir bimesiruto le****ha*** *'adon* ***ha****'ir*

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A story about a certain town (I've forgotten its name) in which there was an informer, and he greatly vexed all of the townspeople by his informing to the lord of the town

(Rodkinsohn 1865: 40)

(10) אשר [...] ידוע ומפורסם לכל אשר **ה**עובד **ה**אלקים הזה לא הניח שום ספר בנגלה ונסתר לא חזר אותו ק"א פעמים
*yadu'a umefursam lekhol asher **ha**'oved **ha**'eloqim hazze lo heni'aḥ shum sefer benigle venistar [...] asher lo ḥazar oto k"a pe'amim*
It is known and renowned to all that this servant of God did not put down any holy book on revealed or concealed matters that he had not gone over a hundred and one times

(Kaidaner 1875: 14a)

(11) ויאמר אליהם אשר בבית הבע"ש יסעדו ביום **ה**שבת **ה**קודש
*vayyomer alehem asher bevet habbe"sh yisadu beyom **ha**shabbat **haqqo**desh*
And he said to them that they would dine at the Ba'al Shem Tov's house on the holy Sabbath day

(Munk 1898: 72)

(12) וראה הנה **ה**בן **ה**אלמנה שוכב ובוכה
*vera'a hinne **hab**ben **ha** 'almana shokhev uvokhe*

(Kaidaner 1875: 15a)

(13) ונעתרה **ה**בעלת **ה**בית לשאלתו
*vene'etra **hab**ba'alat **hab**bayit lishe'elato*
And the mistress of the house agreed to his request

(Shenkel 1903: 22)

Again, this convention does not seem to be rooted in the canonical texts: while a similar phenomenon is attested in Biblical Hebrew, it is very marginal in that stratum of the language (Williams 2007: 8) and therefore is unlikely to be the immediate source for its extremely pervasive Hasidic Hebrew counterpart. Conversely, the same practice is visible in Ashkenazi responsa (Betzer 2001: 91–2) and, as in the case of the definite construct nouns, the Hasidic Hebrew usage is most likely informed by this wider phenomenon. However, it is likely that the convention in both types of literature can be attributed to the same convergence of two unrelated factors, namely Yiddish influence on the one hand and an analogy with noun-adjective phrases on the other.

The first factor accounts for the doubly definite construct chains such as those shown in (6) and (7). In these cases, the authors seem to have regarded the chains (i.e. בעה"ב *baha"b*, an abbreviation of בעל הבית *ba'al habbayit* 'innkeeper', and צדיקי הדור *ṣaddiqe haddor* 'righteous men of the generation') as fixed, indefinite compound nouns despite the fact that they contain a definite article; that is, they do not seem to have recognized the articles as definiteness markers but rather simply as intrinsic lexicalized components of the nouns. As such, in order to make the nouns definite they prefixed the article to the construct noun, resulting in a doubly definite chain. As in the case of definite construct nouns, this practice seems clearly to stem directly from the authors' Yiddish vernacular, in which many of these construct chains function independently as compound nouns with the Hebrew definite article serving as a meaningless lexicalized component;

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such Yiddish compound nouns are made definite by inserting the (Yiddish) definite article before them. For example, the indefinite Yiddish nouns בעל הבית *balebos* 'innkeeper' and צדיקי הדור *tsadike hador* 'righteous men of a generation' can be contrasted with their definite equivalents **דער** בעל הבית ***der*** *balebos* 'the innkeeper' and **די** צדיקי הדור ***di*** *tsadike hador* 'the righteous men of a generation'.

The second factor accounts for the doubly definite construct chains such as those shown in (8)–(13). In contrast to their counterparts in (6) and (7), these chains were not typically used either in Yiddish or in earlier forms of Hebrew as set phrases containing a definite article prefixed to the absolute noun, but rather were most commonly employed as indefinite chains. For example, in (8) the noun הבעה"ג *habbaha"g*, an abbreviation of הבעל העגלה *habba'al ha'agala* 'the carriage driver', is commonly used in Yiddish as a compound noun not containing the definite article, i.e. בעל-עגלה *balegole* 'carriage driver'; similarly, in (9) the definite construct chain האדון העיר *ha'adon ha'ir* 'the lord of the town' has precedent in the indefinite chain אדון עיר *adon ir* 'lord of a town' in Nahmanides' commentary on Numbers (*Masse* 35), while in (10) the definite chain העובד האלקים *ha'oved ha'eloqim* 'the worshipper of God' can be traced to the indefinite עובד אלהים *oved elohim* 'worshipper of God' appearing in the Babylonian Talmud (*Ḥagiga* 9b), and in (11) השבת הקודש *hashabbat haqqodesh* 'the holy Sabbath' is frequently attested as שבת קודש *shabbat qodesh* 'holy Sabbath' in e.g. Moshe Alshich's seventeenth-century biblical commentary. Therefore, unlike the cases shown in (6) and (7), in these instances the Hasidic Hebrew authors did not adopt well-known phrases already containing one definite article and add another; rather, they prefixed both definite articles themselves. This suggests that the authors regarded these construct chains not as compound nouns to be made definite by the addition of a second ה *h* prefix, but as noun-adjective phrases in which both noun and adjective must be definite in order to make the whole phrase definite. This process is most clearly visible in (11), in which the authors could easily have confused the absolute noun קודש *qodesh* 'holiness' with the very similar adjective קדוש *qadosh* 'holy'. As discussed in 2.1.1, these non-standard constructions are so prevalent that they should not be disregarded simply as unsystematic mistakes but rather can be interpreted as a natural development in an evolving and uniquely Eastern European form of Hebrew.

2.2 Split construct chains

According to standard Biblical and post-Biblical Hebrew convention, two construct nouns are never linked by the conjunction *waw*; instead, one of them is placed after the following absolute noun, prefixed by *waw* and bearing a possessive pronominal suffix (for details of this practice in Biblical Hebrew see Joüon and Muraoka 2006: 434–5; in Rabbinic Hebrew see Segal 1927: 187–8; in the language of Palestinian *piyyuṭim* see Rand 2006: 250–2; and in medieval Spanish-Provençal Hebrew see Rabin 2000: 93).

In many cases the Hasidic Hebrew authors follow this historical precedent, as shown in (14).

(14) כח ה' וגבורתו
*koaḥ h' **u**gevurato*

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'[. . .] the power and might of the Lord [. . .]'

(Rodkinsohn 1865: 11)

However, they sometimes deviate from the above standard construction by inserting the conjunction *waw* between two or more construct nouns. This type of split construct chain can be seen in (15), which contains two construct nouns separated by the conjunction *waw,* and in (16), which contains two pairs of construct nouns separated by two *waws*.

(15) קדושת והפלאת רבינו
qedushat ***ve****hafla'at rabbenu*
The holiness and wonder of our Rebbe

(Rodkinsohn 1865: 6)

(16) ראשי ואלופי פרנסי ומהניגו* הקהל הקדוש דקראקא
rashe ***ve*** *'allufe parnese* ***u****manhigu** *haqqahal haqqadosh deqroqe*
(*sic.; most likely מנהיגי *manhige* was intended)
The heads and masters, the chiefs and leaders of the holy community of Krakow

(Rodkinsohn 1865: 51)

This non-standard usage is found in certain medieval Karaite *piyyuṭim* (Rabin 2000: 93), but it is doubtful whether this literature exerted any direct influence on the authors of the Hasidic Hebrew corpus. By contrast, precisely the same construction is attested in Alshich's commentary on Psalm 87 in the phrase קדושת וחיבת הארץ *qedushat veḥibbat ha'areṣ* 'the holiness and love of the land', and this is more likely to have had some influence on the Hasidic Hebrew authors (both because they would have been intimately familiar with this widely read text and because its traces are visible in other aspects of the grammar of the tale corpus; see Kahn 2012b). Moreover, any such influence was probably compounded by the existence of a similar construction in the authors' vernacular. The construct chain is not a feature of the Yiddish language, which instead frequently expresses the possessive relationship between nouns by means of the preposition פֿון *fun* 'of' placed before the possessor (Mark 1978: 178–9). In such constructions it is not uncommon for the possessums to be linked by the conjunction און *un* 'and'. The existence of such a mechanism in the authors' native language is likely to have informed their Hebrew writing and overridden any sense that they may have had of the construction being ungrammatical. As in the case of non-standard definiteness of construct chains, although this usage differs from the canonical Hebrew norms it need not be interpreted prescriptively as an error, but rather more neutrally as an internal linguistic development.

2.3 Construct chains with abstract plural absolute nouns

When Hasidic Hebrew construct chains are composed of a plural construct noun, the following absolute noun is typically plural as well. This applies even if the noun refers to an abstract concept that outside of construct chain settings appears only in the singular. This practice is shown in (17)–(19).

(17) כאשר כלו העם לילך מ**בתי מדרשים**
*ka'asher kalu ha'am lelekh mib****batte midrashim***

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When the people finished going from study houses

(Rodkinsohn 1865: 3)

(18) ואמרו לו הבט נא בתוך הארון קודש וראה בתוכו כמה **ספרי תורות**
ve'amru lo habbet na betokh ha'aron qodesh vera'a betokho kamma ***sifre torot***
And they said to him, 'Please look inside the ark', and he saw inside it several Torah scrolls

(Kaidaner 1875: 19b)

(19) ויצו הרב על השמש להכריז בכל **בתי כנסיות** וכל **בתי מדרשות**
vayeṣav harav al hashammash lehakhriz bekhol ***batte kenesiyyot*** *vekhol* ***batte midrashot***
And the Rebbe ordered the beadle to make a declaration in all synagogues and in all study-houses

(Shenkel 1903: 17)

This Hasidic Hebrew convention seems to be ultimately traceable to Rabbinic Hebrew, in which the absolute noun following a plural construct noun is frequently plural as well, even if it refers to an abstract concept; this contrasts with Biblical Hebrew, in which the absolute noun in such chains typically remains in the singular (Pérez Fernández 1999: 70). The Hasidic Hebrew preference for this post-biblical convention over its biblical counterpart appears on first inspection to constitute evidence that, as commonly believed, the language of the tales is predominantly rabbinic-based; as such, it does not seem to warrant special examination. However, such an explanation is belied by the fact that the tales are actually replete with biblical grammatical elements (see Kahn 2012a) and that rabbinic elements are not necessarily chosen by default (as will be discussed further below); therefore, the authors' consistent adoption of this particular rabbinic feature should not be dismissed as a motiveless norm. Rather, in this case the reason for the authors' selection of the rabbinic construction may be due to the fact that it features two plural nouns in succession: attraction seems to have been a powerful force in Hasidic Hebrew, having shaped other aspects of its grammar (see Kahn, forthcoming), and may have extended to a predilection for structures such as this in which all elements correspond in number.

2.4 Construct chains composed of adjectives

While most Hasidic Hebrew construct chains are composed solely of nouns, some contain an adjective instead of one of the nouns. The adjective may be in the construct position, as in (20), but also in the absolute position, as in (21) and (22).

(20) ולמד שם בגודל חריפות ובקיאות עד שנעשה גדול **התלמידים** בישיבה
velamad sham begodel ḥarifut uveqi'ut ad shena'aśa gedol ***hattalmidim*** *bayeshiva*
And he studied there with great talent and expertise until he became the greatest of the students in the yeshiva

(Shenkel 1903: 19)

(21) והיה שוקד על לימודו ב**חכמת** האלקית יום ולילה
*vehaya shoqed al limmudo be****ḥokhmat*** *ha'****eloqit*** *yom valayla*

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And he would immerse himself in his study with Godly holiness day and night

(Rodkinsohn 1864: 22)

(22) עשו שם סגולות אשר הגידו נשים זקנות להבגיס [להכניס] בתוכה **חתולי** שחורות
aśu sham segulot asher higgidu nashim zeqenot lehavgis [lehakhnis] betokha ***ḥatule*** *sheḥorot*
They made remedies there, as old women told [them] to bring black cats into it

(Rodkinsohn 1864: 43)

When adjectives appear in the absolute position, they serve to modify the associated construct nouns just as attributive adjectives modify their head nouns in noun-adjective phrases. In such cases the adjectives typically match the construct nouns in number; for example, in (21) both the noun and adjective are singular, while in (22) both are plural. Similarly, they usually match the nouns in gender; for example, in (20) both the noun and adjective are masculine, while in (21) both are feminine. However, in rare cases gender discord is exhibited, as in (22) in which the construct noun is masculine while the adjective is feminine; this seems to reflect an occasional tendency towards gender discord visible throughout the tale corpus (Kahn, forthcoming).

The phenomenon of construct chains with adjectives in the absolute position is noteworthy because it does not appear to have a clear precedent in well-known earlier forms of Hebrew, which seem to follow the biblical model whereby a non-substantivized adjective may appear in the construct position (Gibson 1994: 30; Joüon and Muraoka 2006: 438–9) but not in the absolute. The Hasidic Hebrew usage appears to have evolved as an alternative to noun-adjective phrases. It may have been based on analogy with the converse practice known from biblical and post-biblical literature whereby adjectives may appear in the construct state modifying the associated absolute noun. In addition, it was most likely reinforced by the authors' tendency to confuse construct chains with noun-adjective phrases as discussed in 2.1.2. Again, although this construction may be rooted in the authors' misunderstanding of a classical construction, it need not be dismissed as a mistake but rather viewed as an independent development in a productive written idiom.

2.5 Construct chains modified by attributive adjectives

Although the Hasidic Hebrew authors employ the construct chain frequently and with apparent ease, they tend to avoid it in conjunction with attributive adjectives in favour of the possessive particle של *shel* (see section 3.1.4 below). When construct chains do appear with attributive adjectives, typically either the construct chain constitutes a set phrase, as in (23) and (24), or the absolute noun and associated adjective comprise one, as in (25).

(23) **בבית הכנסת** הגדולה שבעיר לבוב הדליק השמש הרבה נרות
bevet hakkeneset *haggedola shebe'ir levov hidliq hashammash harbe nerot*
In the large synagogue in the city of Lvov the beadle lit many candles

(Shenkel 1903: 3)

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(24) בסעודת **ליל שבת** הקודם
bise'udat lel shabbat haqqodem
At the meal of the previous Sabbath eve
(Bromberg 1899: 18)

(25) הנה ב**התגלות הצדיק** הקדוש רבו החסידים ליסע אליו
*hinne be**hitgallut haṣṣaddiq** haqqadosh ravu haḥasidim lissa elav*
Upon the revelation of the holy righteous one, the Hasidim would often travel to [visit] him
(Rodkinsohn 1865: 1)

There are some isolated cases of adjectives modifying construct chains that do not conform to this pattern; for example, the construct chain in (26) is not composed of a commonly employed set phrase. However, such exceptions are relatively rare.

(26) ואז היה עני שלא היה לו שום אופן וסיבה שיהיה לו **צרכי פסח** המרובים
*ve'az haya ani shelo haya lo shum ofen vesibba sheyihye lo **ṣorkhe pesaḥ** hamerubbim*
And then there was a poor man who had no way or reason to [be able to afford] the many Passover necessities
(Bromberg 1899: 28)

The fact that the authors typically avoid modifying nouns in construct chains with attributive adjectives suggests that they found such constructions difficult or awkward. This may be linked in part to their tendency (discussed in 2.4) to employ adjectives as one of the members of a construct chain, in that they may subconsciously have perceived construct chains with attributive adjectives simply as unwieldy or confusing variations on those non-standard formations. The fact that attributive adjectives typically appear in Hasidic Hebrew construct chain settings only as part of, or in association with, set phrases may support this interpretation, because it suggests that the authors understood such constructions to be individual compound nouns rather than construct chains as such (as in the case of the Yiddish-influenced definite construct nouns discussed in 2.1.1 and doubly definite construct chains discussed in 2.1.2).

3. Possessive particles

3.1 Particle של *shel*

In addition to the construct chain, the Hasidic Hebrew authors sometimes employ the particle של *shel* 'of' in order to convey a possessive relationship between nouns. However, in general they tend to use של *shel* somewhat less frequently than they do the construct chain; moreover, while in certain cases they seem to regard it as interchangeable with the construct chain, they often select it in syntactic and semantic contexts that differ from those in which construct chains are found. These trends are noteworthy for three reasons. First, given that של *shel* is a characteristic marker of Rabbinic Hebrew (Pérez Fernández 1999: 32; Bendavid 1971: 462, 469), the fact that it does not feature more prominently in Hasidic Hebrew gainsays the traditional understanding of this idiom as chiefly rabbinic-based. Second, considering that the use of the Yiddish

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possessive particle פֿון *fun* bears a much closer syntactic resemblance to של *shel* than to the construct chain, the authors' frequent use of the construct chain seems to be at odds with the scholarly characterization of Hasidic Hebrew as 'sometimes nothing but Yiddish idioms with Hebrew words' (Rabin 2000: 80). Third, the fact that של *shel* is often restricted to specific syntactic contexts challenges the perception that Hasidic Hebrew authors employed constructions indiscriminately due to their limited grammatical understanding.

3.1.1 Interchangeable with construct chain

As mentioned, in some cases של *shel* is employed in identical syntactic contexts to the construct chain. This is shown in (27) and (28), which contain two absolute nouns linked by the particle.

(27) הכלה **של** הגביר הנ"ל נתעלפה פתאום
hakkala ***shel*** *haggevir hana"l nitalfa pitom*
The bride of the aforementioned rich man fainted suddenly
(Rodkinsohn 1865: 8)

(28) ומי שהוא קדוש מבטן ולא עבר שום עבירה לא יכול לקיים המצוה **של** תשובה
umi shehu qadosh mibbeṭen velo avar shum avera lo yakhol lekayyem hammiṣva ***shel*** *teshuva*
And one who is holy from the womb and has not committed any transgressions cannot perform the commandment of repentance
(Munk 1898: 5)

This interchangeable use of the construct chain and של *shel* is underscored by the fact that a single author may employ the same two nouns in both constructions within the same paragraph, as comparison of (28) with (29) below illustrates.

(29) ואם תעבור העבירה הזאת תוכל לקיים **מצות תשובה**
ve'im ta'avor ha'avera hazzot tukhal lekayyem ***miṣvat teshuva***
'[. . .] and if you commit this transgression, you will be able to perform the commandment of repentance [. . .].'
(Munk 1898: 5)

This phenomenon has a parallel in Rabbinic Hebrew, in which the construct chain and particle של *shel* often overlap in usage (Pérez Fernández 1999: 32). However, as mentioned above, Hasidic Hebrew makes somewhat more sparing use of של *shel* than does its rabbinic antecedent. There is some variation in this respect between individual authors; for example, Bromberg and Shenkel select של *shel* more than Kaidaner, who avoids it almost entirely; nevertheless, the corpus is relatively uniform in that no author seems to employ the particle with quite the same frequency and productivity as the construct chain.

3.1.2 In set phrases

Although של *shel* is sometimes employed productively in contexts indistinguishable from those in which the construct chain is found, it often appears as part of a set phrase that is well known from rabbinic literature. Examples of this are the phrases shown in (30)–(32), all of which are attested in rabbinic and medieval texts such as the Babylonian Talmud, midrashim, Rashi's commentaries, etc. The relative frequency with which של *shel* appears in set phrases seems to

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constitute further evidence that to a certain extent the Hasidic Hebrew authors favoured the construct chain as a productive method of expressing nominal possession.

(30) ועלה המקטרג וקטרג עליו לפני ב״ד **של** מעלה
*ve'ala hammeqaṭreg veqiṭreg alav lifne b"d **shel** ma'ala*
And the prosecutor went up and prosecuted him before the Heavenly Court
(Shenkel 1903: 8)

(31) ובליל ש״ק אחרון **של** פסח אחרי סעודת שלחנו נפטרה
*uvelel sh"q aḥaron **shel** pesaḥ aḥare se'udat shulḥano niftera*
And on Friday night, the last night of Pesach, after the meal at his table she died
(Bromberg 1899: 38)

(32) בעת פטירת רש״י ז״ל הלכו לנגדו כל הפמליא **של** מעלה
*be'et peṭirat rash"i z"l halkhu lenegdo kol happamalya **shel** ma'ala*
At the time of the death of Rashi, of blessed memory, the entire heavenly host went before him
(Munk 1898: 7)

3.1.3 With proleptic suffix

In more than half of the cases in which the particle של *shel* appears in the Hasidic Hebrew corpus, it is employed in conjunction with a proleptic possessive suffix, most commonly 3ms as in (33) and (34), but occasionally 3fs as in (35) or 3mp as in (36). In such cases the noun following the possessive suffix is typically definite.

(33) ומנהגו **של** הרבי מרדכי הנ״ל שהיה יושב תמיד בבהמ״ד
*uminhago **shel** harabbi mordekhay hana"l shehaya yoshev tamid bevehami"d*
And the custom of the above-mentioned Rabbi Mordechai was that he always used to sit in the study-house
(Shenkel 1903: 6)

(34) מה טיבו **של** השחוק ששחק רבינו אמש בערב
*ma ṭivo **shel** haśśeḥoq sheśaḥaq rabbenu emesh ba'erev*
'[. . .] What is the nature of the laugh that our Rebbe laughed yesterday evening?'
(Rodkinsohn 1865: 1)

(35) אחרי הדברי׳ האלה סבלה רוב צער ועוני עד נשאה לבה **של** היתומה הנ״ל לנסוע לסטאמבול
*aḥare haddevari' ha'ele savla rov ṣa'ar ve'oni ad neśa'a libba **shel** hayetoma hana"l linso'a lestambul*
After these matters she suffered much distress and misery, until the heart of the above-mentioned orphan girl desired to travel to Istanbul
(Bodek 1866: 1)

(36) כששותין לחיים הקב״ה מוחל עונותיהם **של** ישראל
*kesheshotin leḥayyim haqb"h moḥel avonotehem **shel** iśra'el*
When one drinks a toast the Holy One, Blessed Be He, forgives the sins of Israel
(Munk 1898: 16)

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This construction most likely derives directly from Rabbinic Hebrew, in which it is a prominent feature (Pérez Fernández 1999: 32). However, the Hasidic Hebrew authors again deviate from rabbinic precedent in that this proleptic construction is for them a disproportionately common vehicle for של *shel*, while in rabbinic literature the particle is widely attested in many other settings as well. This further supports the suggestion that של *shel* is employed somewhat less freely and productively than the construct chain in the tale corpus.

3.1.4 With attributive adjectives

The final relatively common use of של *shel* in Hasidic Hebrew is in possessive constructions containing attributive adjectives. As discussed in 2.5 above, nouns appearing in construct chains in the tale corpus are not usually modified by adjectives; instead, the authors often prefer to employ the possessive particle in such cases. The adjectives in these possessive constructions almost invariably modify the first noun rather than the second, as shown in (37) and (38).

(37) מעשה גדולה ונוראה **של** הרב אור העולם
ma'aśe gedola venora'a ***shel*** *harav or ha'olam*
A great and awesome story of the Rebbe, light of the world
(Shenkel 1903: 7)

(38) ואמר [...] שהרמב"ם כוון בזה לסוד האמתי **של** הקטורת
ve'amar [...] sheharamba"m kivven beze lassod/lesod ha'amitti ***shel*** *haqqeṭoret*
And he said that by this Maimonides meant the real secret of the incense
(Bromberg 1899: 48)

However, occasionally they may modify the second noun as well, as in (39).

(39) תלמיד מובהק **של** הרב הקדוש
talmid muvhaq ***shel*** *harav haqqadosh*
An outstanding student of the holy Rebbe
(Rodkinsohn 1864: 17)

As mentioned above, the authors' preference for של *shel* instead of the construct chain in syntagms containing attributive adjectives suggests that, uncharacteristically, in such cases they were more at ease with the post-biblical particle (possibly due to confusion caused by their use of adjectives as members of construct chains).

3.2 Particle -ד *de-*

In addition to the post-Biblical Hebrew particle של *shel*, the Hasidic Hebrew authors make use of its Aramaic equivalent, -ד *de-*. However, they do not seem to have regarded this Aramaic particle as interchangeable with the construct chain or של *shel*, but rather employ it only in two particular circumstances: they do not typically use it to indicate a possessive relationship between words, but rather to convey a geographic or, somewhat less frequently, a temporal one. Interestingly, in these settings -ד *de-* is used extremely systematically, to the almost complete exclusion of the construct chain and של *shel*.

When the particle has a geographic sense it usually serves to link a common noun with a following proper one; the common noun generally denotes an

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individual, event, or institution originating from or based in a particular geographic location while the proper noun denotes the location in question. This type of construction is shown in (40) and (41).

(40) ואוכל לשוב לביתי טרם יום השוק **ד**באלטע
ve'ukhal lashuv leveti ṭerem yom hashuq ***de****balṭe*
'[. . .] and I will be able to return to my house before the market day of Balta'
(Rodkinsohn 1865: 37)

(41) והוציאו דיבה על כל רבנים עדת החסידים עד שבאו לדבור מענין הרב הקדוש **ד**מעזעריטש
vehoṣṣi'u dibba al kol rabbanim adat haḥasidim ad sheba'u lidbor me'inyan harav haqqadosh ***de****mezeritsh*
And they spoke libellously of all the Rebbes of the Hasidic community, until they came to speak about the matter of the holy Rebbe of Mezeritch
(Kaidaner 1875: 15b)

In some cases the particle is instead prefixed to a common noun with geographic reference such as עיר *ir* 'city'; this is itself usually followed by the place name, as in (42), but may be unaccompanied, as in (43).

(42) ספר [. . .] הנמצא בביבליטעק **ד**עיר מלוכה וויען
sefer [. . .] hannimṣa bebibliṭeq ***de****'ir melukha vien*
A holy book [. . .] located in a library of the capital city Vienna
(Bodek 1866: 5)

(43) נסוג דרכינו לבית הפרנס **ד**עיר
nasog darkenu levet happarnas ***de****'ir*
'[. . .] Our path ended up leading to the house of the community leader of [the] town [. . .]'
(Bodek 1866: 7)

Occasionally, the second element may be an adverb of place rather than a noun, as in (44).

(44) ויתפלל בבית הכנסת **ד**שם
vayitpallel bevet hakkeneset ***de****sham*
And he prayed in the local synagogue (lit: the synagogue of there)
(Shenkel 1903: 24)

The origins of this construction are not completely clear, though it may be based on an analogy with the well-known Hebrew and Yiddish designation for Vilnius, ירושלים דליטא *yerushalayim deliṭa* (Yiddish: *yerusholayim delite*) 'Jerusalem of Lithuania'.

By contrast, when the particle has a temporal sense it generally appears between two common nouns. The first noun usually indicates an event that takes place at a specific time, e.g. סעודת שחרית *se'udat shaḥarit* 'morning meal' in (45) and קידוש *qiddush* 'kiddush' in (46). The second noun typically denotes a specific time, e.g. יום ב' *yom b'* 'the second day' in (45) and ליל שבת *lel shabbat* 'Friday evening' in (46).

(45) ובסעודת שחרית **ד**יום ב' ראינו שינוי גדול
uvise'udat shaḥarit ***de****yom b' ra'inu shinui gadol*

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And at the morning meal of the second day we saw a big change
(Bromberg 1899: 37)

(46) פ״א אחר קידוש **ד**ליל שבת אמר להיושבים על שלחנו
*p''a aḥar qiddush **de**lel shabbat amar lehayoshvim al shulḥano*
Once after Friday night Kiddush, he said to those sitting at his table…
(Bromberg 1899: 34)

More rarely this pattern may be reversed, with the first noun designating the time and the second noun referring to the event, as in (47).

(47) ושוב היו מצפים שיעברו ימי השבוע **ד**פרשת אמור
*veshuv hayu meṣappim sheyya'avru yeme hashavu'a **de**parashat emor*
And again they would wait for the days of the week of the Torah portion 'Emor' to pass
(Bromberg 1899: 43)

The precise derivation of this temporal usage is more obscure than that of the geographic one, save that in a general sense it is most likely traceable to the particle's frequent appearance in the Babylonian Talmud and later Aramaic writings. Moreover, the fact that the Hasidic Hebrew authors methodically employ the particle ד- *de-* in these two specific contexts while avoiding it almost completely in others is striking and cannot clearly be ascribed to any particular motivation or linguistic influence. This phenomenon lends further support to the proposal that Hasidic Hebrew non-standard usages are not indiscriminate but rather can often be considered relatively systematic internal developments.

4. Conclusion

This paper has shown that the Hasidic Hebrew authors employ a range of nominal possessive structures illustrating several important points. First, the Hasidic Hebrew construct chain is extremely widespread and productive, in some cases more so than the characteristically post-biblical particle של *shel*. Second, Yiddish influence plays a significant role in the syntax of the construct chain, being evident in the authors' use of definite construct nouns, doubly definite construct chains, and split construct chains. Third, in some respects – namely certain doubly definite construct chains and the employment of adjectives in the absolute position of construct chains – the authors seem not to have been influenced by external linguistic factors but rather to have evolved unprecedented usages based on analogy with other Hebrew grammatical constructions. Fourth, the authors' use of rabbinic features is not the default but rather is limited to certain circumstances or rooted in specific considerations: thus, the particle של *shel* is most frequently found in set phrases, constructions with proleptic suffixes, and syntagms containing attributive adjectives, while the employment of plural abstract nouns in the absolute position of construct chains may stem from the authors' proclivity for attraction. Fifth, although Yiddish influence on Hasidic Hebrew possessive constructions is indeed widespread, it is not universal, as evidenced by the authors' widespread and productive use of the construct chain relative to של *shel*, which resembles the Yiddish possessive marker פֿון *fun*. Finally, the authors' use of the Aramaic possessive prefix ד- *de-* is remarkably

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restricted and systematic, being employed only in two specific contexts, i.e. the expression of geographical and temporal relationships.

These patterns indicate that nominal possession in Hasidic Hebrew does not constitute an indiscriminate melange of Rabbinic Hebrew, Aramaic, and Yiddish, but rather a relatively cohesive system combining specific elements of these languages in a unique way. Because nominal possession can be regarded as a case in point illustrating some of the characteristic phenomena distributed throughout the grammar of the Hasidic Hebrew tale corpus, the above findings highlight the need to reassess this language as an independent idiom the thorough linguistic analysis of which is crucial to a clear understanding of the diachronic evolution of Hebrew.

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