COHESION AND THE YIDDISH CONSECUTIVE ORDER

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Abstract: Literary Yiddish shows a high frequency of declarative sentences with subject present and the verb in sentence-initial position—the so-called consecutive order. This study is an initial attempt to correlate this construction with cohesive factors; I an essentially testing a hypothesis put forward by Wolfgang Brinkmann and Klaus Fleischmann regarding the same construction in German, where it is very marginal if part of the Schriftpersache at all.

1 Introduction

Despite a few OV characteristics (Basten & Hoed-van Walraven 1986), Yiddish is most efficiently described as an SVO language, one which has even extended the familiar verb-second rule to clauses with overt complementizers.

There is however a very frequent construction in which the verb is in sentence-initial position, even though the node is straightforwardly declarative and the subject is present. The result may be treated as a clause or as an independent sentence:

(1) Ikh hob nis gebat keyn gelt, hob :kh ongeboybn arbets. (Weinreich 1974:122)

'I had no money, so I began to work.'

Hob ikh gevart cyf in. (Weinreich, ibid.)

'So I waited for him.'

Parshteyt nisht zayn shver di mayses.

'His father-in-law did not understand the matter.'

(Birnbaum 1979:304)

This construction, especially common in narrative, has come to be termed, in American textbooks at least, the consecutive order. Note that the construction is frequently (as in the first two examples in (1)) translated as a result clause, but not always (cf. the third example in (1)).

Birnbaum (1979:320(d),(e)) implies that he sees the construction as the result of ellipsis of certain conjunctions, such as derib, derfar, makhnes dem, all with meanings like 'so' or 'therefore' and all of which, when present, require the verb to
follow. He states, "The conjunction may be omitted, but the... word order will still have conclusive force." However he concedes: "The same construction appears even when there is clearly no causative connection." Whence the present study: what in fact does determine the use of the consecutive order?

The view that the meaning is basically resultative seems to be a consensus among grammarians of Yiddish. Schaechter (1986: 192-6) refers to it as the resultat-sayer or 'resultative order' though he also uses Weinreich's term. 2 It is regularly translated by English 'so' or 'therefore' clauses in textbooks. However, as Birnbaum (loc. cit.) notes, it occurs in many cases in which the meaning is not resultative, or in which we would have to extend the notion of result rather far beyond the meanings of the English and Yiddish conjunctions we have mentioned. Often the events related by the consecutive order show, at first glance, little more connection than sequence in time. From the texts I have examined for this study (to be described below) we may note the following examples:

(2) Hohn zey gezem vi zayn vayb shtet un bakt broyt in oyvn un nebn ir zitst Eleazar un est, yedn broytli vos zi hit fun oyvn aroyagenumen hot er oyfn ort oyfgegeam, biz es iz shoym nisht gelobn mer keyn teyg in di knet-pakle, un der oyvn iz geven leydik.

Bot zikh eyner fun di eyzi-traybers ongarufn un gezogt...

'They saw how his wife stood baking bread in the oven and how Eleazar was sitting beside her, and each loaf that she took out of the oven he ate on the spot, until there was no more dough in the dough-tray, and the oven was empty."

(Sc) one of the mule-drivers said..." (1b)

Here, although we can translate with English 'so' (which is after all by no means limited to strictly resultative clauses), what has gone before does not really bring about the remark of the mule-driver. The following is rather similar:

(3) ...um kile vaser-kvain hohn gefiom dor in tol.

Mohn zay zikh ale dort gehark...

'...and cool water fountains were flowing there in the valley."

(Sc) they all turned aside there..." (1d)

Compare now the following examples:
(4) Azoy vi zey bohn zikh nor aveggezetat bohn zey derzen vi a groynes shlang kuntn un geyz zey farbay.

Rabbi Eleazar a sog geton tsuo shlang...

'No sooner had they seated themselves than they saw a huge snake coming past them.' (1d)

Rabbi Eleazar was not caused to address the snake, and, without more background than this, we would be unlikely to use English 'so' in this case.

(5) Hot R. Eleazar a sog geton tsuo shlang: 'Shlang, shlang!' Ker tseurkk, vayl der mentah vos du geyst im hargzen hec shoyn tahwe geton, er hot kharote gehet oyezn sind vos er geton un er hot genumen oye zikh mir aka alekhs nitst tuo ton!

Bohn zikh di khavveyrim gevundert dos tuo herna...

'Rabbi Eleazar said to the snake, 'Snake, snake!' Turn back, for the man you are going to kill has repented, he has atoned for the sin that he committed and he has undertaken to do such an evil thing no more! The disciples were amazed to hear this...'

Here a causative conjunction seems even less likely than in (4).

(6) ...hot R. Eleazar vider gezogt tuo im: 'Shlang, shlang!' Nokhden vos n'bot dir gezogt fun himl un n'bot dir gegehn reshus tuo gen hargzen yeneh mentshn, hot yeneh kharote gehet oyezn zava sind un er hot genumen oye zikh es mer niht tuo too, ker zikh also taurik fun dayn ves!

iz der shlang gebliba shtem...

...Rabbi Eleazar spoke again to him: 'Snake, snake! After you were spoken to from heaven and given permission to kill that man, he atoned for his sin and undertook to do it no more; turn back therefore from your path! The snake merely stood there...'

Here the meaning seems to be adversative.

Below I will reproduce one of the shorter texts in its entirety in order to show how the consecutive order functions throughout. I turn now to the German grammarians.

2 The Brinkmann-Fleischmann hypothesis

Although verb-initial declarative sentences with subject present are not unknown in formal written German, they are marginal. However,
the construction has engendered considerable discussion, much of it historical in nature. Two recent writers have nonetheless offered a structural hypothesis which promises to shed some light on Yiddish.

Hauer (1926:3467-76), summarizing his earlier and later work, concludes that the construction was common in GDR with all types of verb, began to disappear in late GDR times and died out completely in early WGB. From the middle of the 15th century it appears again, especially in writings based on Latin models and beginning with verbs of saying, whence it spread to other verbs by analogy.


In the Schriftsprache of his own time, Hauer says, the construction survives in comic strips and other sorts of humor, in the usage of certain novelists to create an archaic flavor, and in serialized novellas appearing in newspapers, where he refers to it as an Affectation (Manierheit). A brief excerpt will suffice:


Dienner (1926:248-255) disagrees with Hauer regarding the verba dicendi as the source of the verb-initial declaratives; he offers several pages of new examples with other verbs from the 15th century on.

Pleischmann (1973:210-221), in a comprehensive synchronic study of all cases of sentence-initial verb in German, includes our topic under two headings: (a) folk-song flavor (Volksliedton) and (b) slang (dialect?) in narratives (Umgangssprachlich (mundartlich?) in Erzählungen). Here is his characterization:

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Vor allem Erzählungen erhalten durch die (the clause-initial position-ED) dringendes; die geschilderten Sachverhalte werden zügig und unverhüllt nebeneinander gesetzt, es fehlt die Distanz, um sie zueinander in eine andere Beziehung als die natürliche, prätable durch die Geschichtenfolge gegebene temporale Beziehung oder die im Sprecher ablaufende associative Abfolgebeziehung zu stellen.6 (1973:220)

And:

Die Abhängigkeit von der Situation verhindert, dass der Sprecher an dem betreffenden Sachverhalt Stellung nimmt, d.h. ihm einen Platz in einem Rollenzuweis.6 (1973:221, Fn 22)

Fleischmann quotes Brinkmann (1962:477) to the same effect:

Die situationsbestimte Erstellung der Personform zeigt für das dialogische Wesen der Sprache, während die Zweistellung dazu diesen kann, Mitteilungen zu geben, die unabhängig von der Situation sind.8

In a word, the claim is that the German equivalent of the construction we are examining signals a dependence on the situation: the speaker chooses, as it were, not to "take a position" on the relationship between the event coded in the verb-initial construction and the proceeding events, in the sense of providing a particular conjunction; with the verb-initial construction the speaker indicates instead the dependence of that relationship on the situation. If we take the term "situation" to mean discourse context, this claim ought to be interpretable in terms of cohesion as investigated, for example, by Halliday & Hasan 1976.

I have, therefore, explored the possibility that a high degree of cohesion links the consecutive-order clauses to their context. That the consecutive order itself is a cohesive device goes without saying; the first clause in a narrative is never in the consecutive order, and in order to interpret such sentences we must somehow refer to preceding discourse—hence the common "resultative" concept.

3 The Texts

I have examined the consecutive order in a collection of seventeen short narratives published under the title Bedarchey Avoyasim (In the Ways of Our Fathers), Vol. III, by Menachem Sera (Jerusalem, 1979). These are legends of the Tanam and stories for young people. My coding system for the stories is given in the Appendix.
In order to show the operation of the consecutive order in a complete story, I give 'id, "The Mule Drivers," in its entirety.*

The Mule Drivers

1. Rabbi Eliazzar, the son of R. Shimon ben Yokhai, did not want to study Torah in his youth.
2. He preferred hiring himself out to people as a burden-bearer, carrying burdens on his shoulders, to bending his shoulders to the Torah.
3. He was strong and powerful and he ate a great deal.
4. One time there came into his town mule-drivers who wished to port meal from there to nearby towns.
5. They came by the house of Rabbi Shimon.
6. They saw how his wife was standing baking bread in the oven with Eliazzar standing there eating.
7. Each loaf that she took out of the oven he ate on the spot,
8. until there was no more dough left in the dough-tray, and the oven was empty.
9. One of the mule-drivers said:
10. "It can only be that an evil serpent is lying in the belly of that boy."
11. "It looks as if this one was born only to bring a hunger into the world," another one said.

*the "ties" may for the moment be ignored.
12 Dos hohn zey geredt tavishn sikh, other Eliasaz hot zeyere sayt guhr gehert un er hot shohn gevast vos tuv ten zey.

13 Ven zey hohn ibergelozt dort zeyere eyzen un zenen segagehen brengen zeyer shkoyre ardysfus-lodon ofy di eyzen.

14 hot Eliasaz genumen di eyzen ofy zayne akalen un er hot zey ardysfisfert eyzen eyzen ofy di dakh-boyden.

15 Ven di eyz-treymens zenen taurig-

16 hohn zay gosnok a geshrey az m’hot zey tawegavanet zeyere eyzen.

17 Ober do hot eyzofgeboyn zayne

18 he saw the mules on the roof;

19 hot ob serzem di eyzen in dakh-

20 vorum er a anderer hot es aza

21 Zenen (reyzarayn tau R. Shomin’en

22 "Un farvos heot er es aykh getun?"

23 "Hepn"—hohn zey gemafert—"mir

This they were saying to each other, but Eliasaz heard their talk very well and he already knew what to do to them.

When they had left their mules mules there and had gone to bring their produce to load on- to the mules, Eliasaz took their mules on his shoulders and carried them one by one to the roof.

When the mule-drivers returned with their produce and didn’t find their mules, they shouted that their mules had been stolen.

But then one raised up his eyes; they understood that this was the doing of Eliasaz, since who else had the strength to take a mule on his shoulders and carry it to the roof?

They went into Rabbi Shimon’s house and told him what his son had done to them.

"And why did he do it to you?" Rabbi Shimon asked them—"didn’t you somehow insult him?"

"No"—they answered—"we were just talking among ourselves, amazed at his great prowess in eating,
'Uh farvose hot ir anselkes oykh bloyz tavishba zikh geredt?''--hot (sey)l. Shimon vayer gefregt--''ts'e ben est er fun ayers?''

Der Bashefer vos hot im bashan hot oykh bashan, dayn een vos er baderf, yestet ayt un bet hoy im makhile un zogt im in mayn nomen az er zol ayt'asreyn brengen di eyl'men.''

27 Noba (sos) azoy gaten un Elissors hot zey arogesetrog zeyer eagle.

28 Obre anschot vos frier hot er zey arogesefirt eynen eynen hot er zey yestet tsvye tsvye in smol erophe-firt, un aleizen geshtesem un hoba zikh nicht gekom opvunders, zey hoba nokh asa gveyra bay a mentan nicht gazen.

4 Results

There are 920 narrative clauses (that is, excluding reported speech) in the seventeen stories, of which 149, or 16%, are in the consecutive order. Of these, no fewer than 84, or 56%, have verbs of saying as main verb. The counts for the verbs dicendi are: 'said', 37; 'answered', 17; 'asked', 11; of the following fewer than ten instances: 'summoned', 'related', 'laughed', 'prayed', 'notified', 'ordered', 'read verse', 'cried', 'called', 'admitted'.

Clearly, in modern literary Yiddish, as in NBE, the consecutive order preponderantly affects verbs of saying. Next most prevalent are verbs of motion: 39 out of the 149, or 26%. Most frequent of these is 'went (to)', ten instances; others are 'went by', 'placed (person in seat)', 'went in', 'turned (to him)', 'remained', 'got up (from sitting position)', 'went with', 'released (hold on s.o.)', 'placed self', 'went by vehicle', 'rose up (wave of sea)', 'became still (sea)', 'fall in', 'untwined self', 'ran out', 'appeared (to s.o.)', 'arrived', 'jumped over', 'caught', 'didn't want to let go', 'separated self from'.

one said an evil serpent lay in his belly... and another said he came to bring a hunger into the world... but we didn't intend our talk to reach his ears.
There were 16 consecutive orders with verbs of mental activity, most frequently 'knew' with six instances; others were 'understood', 'were aggrieved', 'heard', 'decided', 'was heard', 'became angry'.

The remaining ten verbs are almost all actions: 'gave birth', 'was punished', 'set', 'gave', 'took', 'killed'. Only three statives were found: 'it was the day of', 'was greater than', 'it was so'.

Except for the prevalence of the verbs of saying, probably not much can be attributed to the frequency of verb types or the general frequency of actions over statives; these sorts of verbs are the most frequent in the stories in general. However, there are enough cases of contrast—cases in which we find the same verb in consecutive order and in regular second position—to give us some idea of the cohesion factors. The basic idea in Haliday and Hasan's (1976) concept of cohesion is the tie: a sentence is linked to preceding discourse material, immediate or remote, by an anaphor, a repetition, a lexically subordinate or otherwise related item, etc. In this study we will need only anaphoric ties and repetitions. An anaphoric tie is shown in the example below, from the story given on pp. 86-88.

(7) Amol se'ev gekunmen in sayn shhot qaral-traybera...

From (6) above, an example of a repetition:

(8) ...hot R. Eleasar vider gezogt tsu im: »Shlang, shlang...«

The cases of contrast I have been able to extract from the stories are as follows (ties indicated; note them with consecutive order):

(9) With verb 'saw'.

Verb in second position:

Hot R. Shimon dan gezogt gevise vertet, un baid hot arumgenumen di shhot a fayer fun himi.

Rabbi Shimon spoke certain words, and at once a fire from heaven encircled the house.

And the disciples saw a smoke going up from the house the entire day.

Consecutive order:

Amol se'ev gekunmen in sayn shhot qaral-traybera...

Once miles drivers came into his town...

They saw his wife standing...
Notice that when the verb 'see' is in second position, the subject is di khayeirim, which is not linked to the preceding, while in the case of the consecutive order the subject is the pronoun zey which is tied to eyziy-trayers in the preceding context. Compare still another case with regular order:

(10) Hohn zey im geantfert: 'Gih nöw a kük, ot der roykh kumt arof fun a fayer fun oybe, vayl haynt kroynt men R. Eleazar a mit a haylig kroynt. Dan hohn di khayeirim gezem vi fir iliglen fun a adler losn sikh arop in dem fayer...
They answered him: "Look, this smoke is rising from a fire from above, for today Rabbi Eleazar is crowned with a holy crown.
Then the disciples say how four eagle's wings were descending into the fire.

In all the examples that follow, the regular order will be contrasted with the consecutive order, in that sequence.

(11) With verb 'go'.
Verb in second position:
Hot R. Eleazar oyserufun: "Voyl iz undzer kheylik..."
Dan zenen di khvevraye tsuyceygan tas R. Yosey'nen un hohn im gezog...
Rabbi Eleazar cried, "Well is our portion..."
Then the disciples went to Rabbi Yosey and said to him...

Consecutive order:
A. Yosey a mol aynefaip in a shartke krenk.
Is R. Eleazar-guye evdey di gezogin basudnn un mewaker-kheyile zaym.
Rabbi Yosey once fell very ill.
Rabbi Eleazar his son-in-law went to visit him and comfort him.

(12) With verb 'turn'.
Verb in second position:
Vi der shlang hot dos gehtot hot er sikh bald oysegdret oyy tsurik um er hot gnenen shnee Lyyn, bis er is tsugikgekumen tsau der meara.
Den hot R. Eleazar sikh gekert tsau di khayeirim...
When the snake heard this he turned back at once and began running rapidly, until he was back at the cave.
Then Rabbi Eleazar turned to the disciples...
Consecutive order:
Ober ot hohn yonfahoybn zeyer oyyn un hohn derzen far zikh a shemen fol vos iz badekt gevorn mit tepikhon fun frishe grozn, syngefanst mit gate beymsf...un kilc wasser-kvail hohn gefloem dort in fol.

Hohn yonf zikh ale korb pokert un hohn zikh anider gesetz...

But now they lifted up their eyes and saw before them a beautiful field which was covered with carpets of fresh grasses, planted with good trees... and cool water-fountains flowed there in the valley. They all turned aside there and sat down...

Compare:
(13) "Lomir geyn un ton khesed mit a nigroym vos iz ful geven mit isidings. Zayn nomen iz R. Yosey..."

Di khevravis hot zikh bald oppokert fun zeyn veg...

"Let us go and perform charity with a pomegranate who is filled with everything (i.e., a learned man). His name is Rabbi Yosey..."

The disciples at once turned aside from their way...

(14) With Verb 'release'.

Verb in second position:
Hot R. Eleasar misgelel goven, un der yid iz farheyt gevorn fun zeyne vundn.

Ober der shlang hot nokh alts nish hot oppoloz dem toyra kerp.

Rabbi Eleasar prayed, and the Jew was healed of his wounds.

But the snake still did not release the dead body.

Consecutive order:
'Oshlang, shlang! Ales vos du huet geton hostel voyl geten. Toik un behalt zikh in daryn mears, un ikh bin goyer pyt Jr az mer solstu keys shoon nisht ton keys bakhfeentshi!

Der der shlang bald oppoloz dem kerp...

"Snake, snake! Everything you have done you have done well...Go and hide in your cave, and I decree hereby that you shall no more do any harm to any creature!"

The snake at once released the body...
(15) With verb 'say'.

Verb in second position:

Hot der shlang bald oggeloom dem kerper fun dem goy, hot aropgeboyzn zayn kop un er iz farshivund gevarn iz zayn lokh.

Dan hot R. Eleazar gezogt sau dem yidn...

The snake at once released the body of the gentle, lowered his head and disappeared into his hole.

Consecutive order:

Hot covergetz zayn run R. Eleazar lebn iz, un hot iz gezogt: "Zits, zayn run, zits. Veyl fun haytign tog veratu geheyligt un du vest vern gerekhnt tzvihihn di heylige layt."

Hot R. Shimon dan gezogt revise verter...

He seated his son Rabbi Eleazar beside him, and said to him: "Sit, my son, sit. Pro from this day you become holy and you will be counted among the holy ones."

Rabbi Shimon then said certain words...

In sum: the consecutive order tends strongly to be used in the case of certain classes of action verbs, notably verbs of saying and verbs of motion; when however we find cases of the same verb used in both the consecutive order and in the regular verb-second construction, the consecutive sentences tend to have cohesive ties to the preceding context, usually to the immediately preceding sentence. Indeed, anaphoric reference to the preceding sentence would seem to be the prototype situation for consecutive sentences.

It appears that the regular construction with verb in second position, in contrast to the consecutive order, is typically used to introduce new material. Let us look again at "The Mule Drivers" on pp. 86-88. Sentences 1-3 may be seen as an introductory outline of the character of Rabbi Eleazar. With sentence 4 the mule drivers enter the story, and this sentence is tied to 5-8, which sets up the scene at the oven. Sentence 9 is in the consecutive order presumably because (a) the verb is a verb of saying and (b) the mule drivers, already brought into the story, are still the topic and sentence 9 is therefore tied to sentence 6. Exactly the same pattern is found in 17-21: in 17, one of the mule drivers happens to look up, which leads to discovery of Eleazar's prank. In 21, though--where the main verb is a motion verb--there is a tie back to the mule drivers again: they are still the topic, in spite of the explanatory digression of 20.

I have found only two exceptions to the above generalizations. One is this:
(16) Consecutive order:

But dan geleyect oyf zikh dem posek: di tovre is vi'a shif fun sakhrim vos brengt fun vaytn ir broyt (gemeynt 'zernig di mayse fun di sakhrim mit shif vos zenen in shu'e fun zayn tovre nitsal ge- vorn un hobb im gebrengt hilf).

Dartsayn di khahomim: di ale yorn fun zayn yeeautim is keyner nish gezhotdin far zayn tsayt.

He then applied to the situation the following verse: the Torah is like a ship of merchants who bring their bread from afar (meaning thereby the matter of the merchants with the ship who were saved by the virtue of his Torah and brought him help).

The sages relate that in all the years of his suffering no one died before his time.

Here there is indeed a verb of saying and there is a tie; but since "the sages" are abruptly introduced we would have expected a regular sentence. It may be noted, however, that "the sages" are an over-riding topic of these stories.

The other exception constitutes the only example in my data of a consecutive sentence with me(n) 'one' (indefinite pronoun) as subject:

(17) Consecutive order:

Zayn mater hot dershemekt a reyehk fun a guna esn un s'hot ir gemumen zeyr khalehn dos harts.

Is men gekumen tau Rabbi's fegen vos m'vol ton...

His mother smelled the aroma of something good to eat and she began to long for it.

(Do they came to the Rabbi to ask what to do...

The Rabbi mentioned is wholly new to the story at this point. Here we definitely would expect a verb-second sentence. However, perhaps the indefinite pronoun as subject makes this a special case.

NOTES

1 I gratefully acknowledge the remarks of Bill Keel on this topic. Spelling in the Romanized Yiddish examples is normalized to the YIVO system.
2 Unfortunately I have been unable to see Zaretski 1929, the most often-cited grammatical work on Yiddish.

3 According to Schachter (1966:61) the consecutive order may indeed have adversative meaning, in which case it is accompanied by special intonation.

4 (transl.) The Latin influence is a major factor, but by itself it does not explain why the phenomenon was limited to the verbs of saying. A second factor was that these verbs were already in what amounts to initial position in quotations. In such cases as "Das ist sehr schön," sagte der Mann, the phrase sagte der Mann is frozen into a formula and then used in direct speech as well. This psychological process could have taken place independently at any time; in the 15th century the Latin models gave it a special impetus. The diffusion of the new type follows from the laws of analogical formation and requires no further explanation.


6 Most of all it gives a narrative a certain urgency. The individual events are rather loosely chained together; there is insufficient distance between them to allow them to be put in any relationship other than the natural one provided by the course of the events themselves or by the course of their associations in the mind of the speaker...Dependence upon the situation prevents the speaker from taking a position with regard to a given event or assigning it to a place in a relief. The situation-determined initial position of the verb attests to the dialogic nature of speech, while the second position may serve to provide material that is independent of the situation.

7 Oddly enough, Prince (to appear), which contains the only previous speculation on the discourse function of the commutative order known to me (her 66.2), is led to suggest precisely the opposite hypothesis: that the consecutive order, like the ES + Subj. Preposing sentences which are her main topic, mark their subject as "not representing entities which have already been evoked in the discourse." Apparently Prince has overlooked the fact that subjects in consecutive sentences, unlike those in her ES sentence, not only may be but frequently are nominal. Finally, neither Prince nor anyone else I have consulted has remarked on the frequency of the consecutive order with verbs of saying.
### APPENDIX

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