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In a discourse analysis with regards to stance and social indexicality, representational language or “TV language” from the series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* illuminates several functions of Yiddish loanwords as variables: stancetakers’ disproportionate stance acts, inter-generational usage of person/type terms to evoke prejudice, and younger speakers’ appropriation of conventional usages. It is suggested that because Yiddish terms often contain conventional associations with usages or users, situated meanings arise from a basis of conventionality. The following situated meanings of Yiddish loanwords and their functionality add to existing third wave variation theory, as variables construct speakers’ desired personae.

1 Introduction

1.1 Yiddish Loanwords as Variables in Scripted Discourse

Based on dialogue from the series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel (TMMM)*, this study analyzes Yiddish loanwords as variables in American English discourse. Beyond the possibility of referencing macro Jewish identities, Yiddish loanwords as variables facilitate stylistic practices, consistent with third wave notions of variability addressed in Section 1.3. The construction of personae that results from stylistic practices is assisted in part by speakers picking and choosing loanwords. Categorizing Jewish styles of personae, rather than Jewish identities, emphasizes the performativity involved in the “indexical behavior” of speakers, rather than implicating “a stable sense of self or identification with social groups or categories” (Eckert 2019:753).

In locating these personae constructions through Yiddish loanword selections, this paper is first and foremost a qualitative study of representational language, or “TV language”. The phenomenon of language in television merits a discussion on its own as to the extent to which scripted, fictional discourse may be studied as a parallel to unscripted, non-fictional discourse (Dynel 2011:43–46, Bednarek 2018). How exactly media influences linguistic output has been explored in various studies, such as English slang acquisition for Bulgarian ESL learners (Charkova 2007) or the introduction of typical Cockney TH-Fronting and L-Vocalization into the Glaswegian vernacular, a finding that has found positive correlation to watching a popular soap opera based in London (Stuart-Smith et al. 2013). Today, binge-watching is pervasive and defines in part the social and cultural landscape of 21st century media consumption. I subscribe to the notion that scholarly analysis of representational language is therefore of increasing value. It can be viewed as both a reflection of and an influence on day to day language (Beers Fägersten et al. 2016:5–6).

1.2 Introducing *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*

From Lenny Bruce’s sketch on “Jewish and Goyish” to deli pastrami on rye, *TMMM* is packed with American Ashkenazi Jewish references. The series is a comedy about stand-up comedy, set in the 1950s and 60s in New York City. Award winning writer and director, Amy Sherman-Palladino explains what comedy means to her, to the series, and to Jewish culture: “I’ve always viewed comedy, especially at this time [1950s-60s], as a Jewish creation—like the rhythm, the cadence. As a kid, I had the ‘2,000-year-old man’ and Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner on a loop. That’s my rhythms and my father’s rhythms” (Burack 2020). Her mention of “rhythm” is particularly interesting when considered literally, since Jewish English vernaculars and Yiddish (the term itself derived from jüdisch, Jewish-German) have unmistakably humorous prosodies in their sing-songy inflection. Sherman-Palladino sought to create a series that reflects real Jews and how they live, speak, interact, and joke. Though set in the mid-20th century, the themes of Jewish humor, tradition, language, and familial relationships remain timeless.

The plot centers around the life of Miriam “Midge” Maisel as a young, fledgling comic in the early days of free form and socially conscious stand-up, a scene dominated by male Jewish New Yorkers. During the day, pressure from her upper-class conservative Jewish family is at odds with her night-life surrounded by beatniks and hipsters in the underground comedy scene, a social group that she does not fit into either. Midge’s character is underscored by the “Jewish American Princess” (JAP) (Waxman 1988) motif, a stereotype that subsists on expectations and appearances. The JAP figure has appeared profusely in popular culture since the 1950s and has been viewed as the product of an indulgent mother who gives her daughter praise and protection, but also endless guilt (Waxman 1988:92). There is a

“ghetto” sensibility to this parental-offspring dynamic, one only understood in the context of Jewish diasporic history as the urge to grasp at any possible control or power. The viewer meets Midge while she is married, though she is divorced shortly after, when her husband, Joel, not only admittedly has an affair with his secretary but breaks off the marriage on the basis of feeling overshadowed by Midge. Divorce gives way to Midge’s autonomy, and though liberating in some respects, being a mom of two and ex-wife in the 1950s forces Midge to take on a new role as a social outcast. Much of Midge’s act, both on and off stage, is formed on the basis of appropriating aspects of her own position in the midst of traditional Jewish familial life.

1.3 A Third Wave Perspective

Studies from the first and second waves of sociolinguistics were generally concerned with fixed social meanings of distinct linguistic features implicating macro social categories. On the other hand, third wave variation studies, as classified by Penelope Eckert, consider the performative ways in which styles, composed of variables, associate with identities (Eckert 2012). The third wave marks a shift in perspective of how social meaning in language is studied, in that speakers adapt stylistic practices contingent on changing contexts and personae (Eckert 2012). This shift has been demonstrated by oft-cited studies, such as the tracking of variables that contribute to stylistically “yuppie speech” in Beijing (Zhang 2005, 2008) or the various personae constructed by Heath, a gay medical student, in his stylistic uses of phonetic variation as a negotiation of a gay “diva persona” (Podesva 2007:482). In these studies, and other third wave studies alike, the proposition of an indexical field (Eckert 2008) is of particular significance.

Eckert discusses an indexical field, as “a field of potential meanings” (Eckert 2008:454). These meanings are constructed by situated usages, thereby enabling meaningful selections. Eckert credits Claude Lévi-Strauss and Dick Hebdige with the concept of bricolage as an analogy for stylistic practice, “in which people recombine things that are already at hand to create something new” (Eckert 2019:753). Hebdige (1979:102–106) explains how a bricoleur selects and removes variables from their normal, expected contexts and places them in new ones. Central to this study is the idea that the foundation of all processes of bricolage is convention: it is the source of resourced variables that form new meaning. In other words, each Yiddish loanword is linked to an associated convention, and it is the speaker’s functionality of the loanword that defines its situated meaning as conventional or unconventional based on intent.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Cline of Yiddish Loanword Indexicality

As in Sarah Bunin Benor’s (2009:234, 2010:2) study of American Jewish inter/intralinguistics, this current study focuses generally on the notion of a distinctly Jewish linguistic repertoire, or the ways in which Jews access features of their ethnolect that are distinct from non-Jews. Benor (2009) prefaces a comprehensive inventory of social and linguistic traits involved in distinct Jewish language by taking a third wave variationist approach: any combination of variables in the inventory has the ability to position the speaker distinctly in relation to non-Jews and other Jews, and the speaker’s choice of one variable or combinations of variables contributes to a larger performance of alignment, (dis)association, and social networking. Some of the social traits relevant to this study are *observance of religious laws and customs and identity as distinct from local non-Jews*. Under each social trait there are a number of linguistic traits related to each of these social circumstances, the following of which are relevant here: *secretive/humorous/derisive ways of talking about non-Jews* and *recognition of language as distinctly Jewish* (Benor 2009:237).

Based on existing quantitative research on Yiddish lexical crossover in American English (Benor 2009, 2010, Schultz 2019), the usage and “lexical domains” (Schultz 2019:2) of such vocabulary in *TMMM* offer meaningful observation as to the extent of Jewishness or *Yiddishkeit* at play. Importantly, not all Yiddish terms do equal work in terms of social indexing of Jewish identity. To organize the terms in a way that reflects their amounts of social indexation, I refer to Benor’s (2010) survey work, in which three major categories of Yiddish emerged based on their usage among Jews and non-Jews, and correlative with independent variables such as age-generation and devoutness. Based on Benor’s (2010) report, I propose a cline of social indexical value of Yiddish loanwords as follows (see Figure 1).

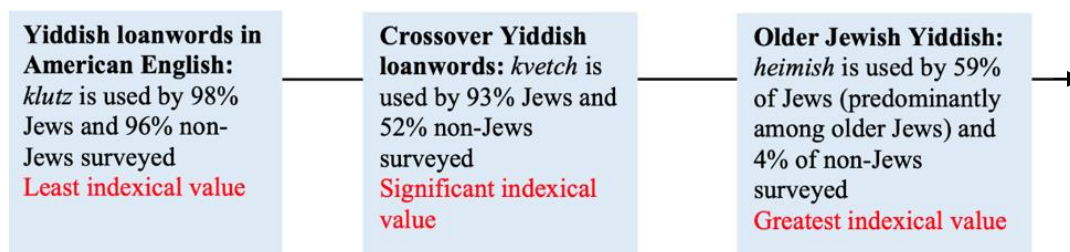


Figure 1: Cline to classify indexical values of Yiddish terms adapted from Sarah Bunin Benor’s (2010) quantitative analysis.

The leftmost category, Yiddish loanwords in American English, includes words such as *klutz* (a clumsy person) or *spiel* (a speech, pitch, performance). These terms are almost as frequent in non-Jew usage as in Jew usage, so much so that users often do not conceive of these loanwords as being of Yiddish origin. Consequently, this current study categorizes the leftmost group as having the least Jewish social indexical value. Other terms that are not included in Benor’s survey but that are featured in *TMMM* are *bagel*, *lox* (salmon, from Yiddish *laks*), or *tuchus* (bottom, rear). For the purposes of recognizing the multiple social indices available with Yiddish loanwords, I will omit such instances due to the questionable amount of Jewish social indexation work that they perform.

The middle category, which Benor calls crossover Yiddish loanwords, are labeled here as having significant indexical value. These are terms such as *kvetch* (to complain), *schmutz* (dirt), or *mensch* (a good person), all of which are in very frequent Jew usage and somewhat frequent non-Jew usage, but nevertheless seem to be doing significant social indexation work considering the reported 90% surveyed Jewish usage and 50% non-Jewish usage (Benor 2010:4). Finally, rightmost is what Benor refers to as older Jewish Yiddish, in which words such as *macher* (mover and shaker), *heimish* (cozy), and *yahrzeit* (anniversary of death) are used by a significant majority of Jews surveyed and marginally by non-Jews. The results show that age-generation was the most important social correlate for this category, discerning between intragroup usage.

Benor’s findings are, of course, limited to a relatively small number of representative terms for which she could survey. Table 1 lists loanwords that appear in *TMMM* seasons 1 and 2 and will be referenced in the current analysis. It is likely, but not comprehensively tested, that these terms fall in the middle or to the right of the cline.

Table 1: Yiddish loanwords that appear in *TMMM* seasons 1 and 2

Loanword	Gloss (see: <i>Jewish English Lexicon</i>)	Season, Episode
<i>Bialy</i> , N.	Bagel-like bread, New Yorkers may refer to bagels as such	S2, E3
<i>Bracha</i> , N.	Blessing	S2, E5
<i>Goy(ish)</i> , N/Adj.	Non-Jewish, WASP-y	S1, E1; S1, E3; S2, E3
<i>Kvell</i> , V.	To feel happy or proud	S2, E5
<i>Kvetch</i> , V. ¹	To complain, usually over minor issues	S2, E6; S2, E4
<i>Plotz</i> , V.	To burst or explode with emotion	S2, E4; S2, E6
<i>Schlemiel</i> , N.	Fool, idiot	S1, E2
<i>Schnorrer</i> , N.	Panhandler, moocher, beggar	S1, E1; S2, E9
<i>Shayna Punim</i> , N. Phrase	Pretty face	S2, E5
<i>Shiksa</i> , N.	Non-Jewish woman, WASP-y	S1, E5
<i>Shutup</i> , V.	To have sex with	S2, E3

2.2 Stance

To unpack the following dialogues, John W. Du Bois’ (2007) stance triangle will be employed to track speech acts as social acts. The stance triangle illustrates the simultaneity of stance acts taken per interaction: the stancetaker aligns themselves with other “subjects”, evaluates the “object” of the conversation, and positions themselves with respect to the object and the evaluation thereof. Social contexts inform stance acts, situating the often fractional role of spoken

¹ Note that *kvetch* can be used as a person/type, meaning someone who complains a lot: “He is always complaining, he is such a *kvetch!*”. However, this usage does not appear in *TMMM*.

communication in a larger scope of complex social choreographies between participants and groups. Du Bois' stance triangle will assist in the following discourse analysis, in conjunction with some terminology and main ideas from Giles and Ogay's (2007) Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). A principle of CAT is that speakers adopt convergence and divergence strategies, in which they seek both "social inclusiveness" as well as "differentiation", partaking in accommodation as they either converge with each other or diverge from one another in their interaction (Giles and Ogay 2007:294).

Through a series of considerations, we may imagine the stance triangle to account for how Yiddish loanwords are in a unique indexical relationship with stance acts. First, it should be considered if the Yiddish loanword is a person/type (i.e., *shiksa*, *schnorrer*), and if not, what kind of person/type it implicates. This prompts a question of relation between object and Yiddish term, distinguishing between stancetakers' evaluations and positions vis-à-vis the object itself and/or the object as a reference to external social meanings, facilitated by the use of Yiddish. In other words, as is often the case, if the Yiddish term in question functions as an attribute, behavior, or description of the object, it becomes ambiguous whether the stancetaker is evaluating and positioning themselves with respect to the object itself and/or to an ulterior Jewish social reference. For example, this is the case in Section 4.2, where the saliency of *schnorrer* is questionable as Rose applies this loanword to her parenting and expectations of Midge. Finally, we may draw conclusions on how loanwords participate in stylistic practices or bricolage. That is, how do speakers either adhere to or resist convention to form meaningful social statements.

3 Methodology

I identified approximately 30 Yiddish terms used in seasons 1 and 2 of *TMMM* and have included surrounding dialogue to contextualize these in discourse. Yiddish terms selected for analysis were those likely to be situated in the middle or to the right of the cline of Jewish social indexical value, as discussed in Section 2.1. To better form an objective reasoning as to how the terms situate themselves with respect to social indexical value, I consult the *Jewish English Lexicon* (JEL), a collaborative database established in 2007 by Sarah Bunin Benor, which documents distinctive Jewish language terms used in English speaking contexts. To define conventional contexts, i.e., the demographics most likely to use a given term, along with standard definitions, the JEL provides a section per entry called "who uses this", in which the contributors note the types of socio-political and religious categories of those who most often access the lexical item, along with the contexts of likely usage. This information provides a basis for defining norms of usages, which can be contrasted with unconventional usages. For example, in Section 4.1, the speaker, Astrid, uses loanwords common among devout Jews in unexpected contexts, making her usage somewhat unconventional. Once I had determined conventional or unconventional usages and contexts of usage, I performed an analysis that took into account relevant relationship information between speakers, body language or tone that is lost in transcription, as well as the historical retrospect portrayed in *TMMM*.

4 Analysis

4.1 Disproportionate Positioning of Self

In the first functionality noticed, Yiddish loanwords act to position the speaker in a particular affective relation to their Jewish persona. *Disproportionate* emphasizes self-positioning as overriding evaluation of the object and alignment with the other subjects(s). An instance of this function occurs in a conversation between Midge, Noah (Midge's brother), and Astrid (Noah's wife). Noah and Astrid drive Midge to a nightclub in the Catskills where she will perform without her family knowing. In this dialogue, *bracha* and *shayna punim*, are used by Astrid. Astrid's character is written to be especially genteel: as a recent convert to Judaism, she is most often portrayed as a try-hard. Unfortunately for Astrid, her relentless desperation to adopt a Jewish persona actually accentuates her out-group status.

Dialogue 1: S2E5 "Midnight at the Concord"

1 Astrid: I just couldn't believe it, when the phone rang and it was you [Midge]!
I mean, normally, when the phone rings, it's a salesman trying to sell me a vegetable brush or my doctor saying, like, "Nope, try again", but today, it was you wanting a ride! Such a *bracha*!

...

- 2 Noah: That's quite a getup you're wearing for a car ride. Going somewhere special tonight?
 3 Midge: Me? Nope.
 4 Astrid: You do look very fancy. Is there a *shayna punim* in the picture?
 5 Midge: Oh, no... Nothing like that.
 6 Astrid: Oh.

Although a convert, Astrid is ironically the most devout Jew in the series, at one point even out-singing the Rabbi during a Yom Kippur service in S2, E7. *Bracha* is listed in the JEL as most commonly accessed among Jews who are “engaged in religious observance and have some Jewish education”, as is *shayna punim* among religious and middle-aged or older Jews (Benor 2012). It is therefore not Astrid’s access to these terms that is so unusual, but rather the contexts in which she uses them. *Bracha* is unexpected: the word pertains most often to religious matters or prayers. The use of *shayna punim*, like *bracha*, is also unexpected: this term of endearment is usually heard when older Jews refer to younger Jews in a smothering, approaching patronizing way.

Audience design theory is relevant here when considering Astrid’s style shift as a response to her Jewish audience (Bell 1984). In both cases, she accesses a particular lexicon meaningfully to emphasize her knowledge of these terms and of the Jewish lingo. The discourse, though, has an ambiguous or somewhat divergent alignment between Midge and Astrid, which is especially apparent by the awkward silence, lack of eye contact, and Midge’s negative response [line 5]. The ambiguity or divergence is likely reinforced by Astrid’s unusual loanword inclusions, as she evaluates the objects (phone-call [line 1] and Midge’s new love interest [line 4]) by magnifying her own position as a Jew above all else. Though an attempt at accommodation, Astrid unintentionally marks herself as a convert type Jew, or merely as an out-group type.

Another instance of disproportionate self-positioning that employs an intentional out-group distinction occurs in S2, E3, when Midge gives a toast at her friend Mary’s conservative, Catholic wedding. It is only a matter of time before her act falls flat with an inappropriate joke: “And whatever you heard, people, I did not *shutup* father O’Brien! I don’t think God would look too kindly on that . . . and if a priest is gonna have sex, I think God would prefer it wasn’t with a Jew. That’s like putting mayonnaise on a *bialy*, ya don’t do it!”. Midge’s profanity is met with gasps, indicative of a divergence between her and the wedding guests, collectively. Similar to Astrid’s deployment, the uses of *shutup* and *bialy*, in conjunction with explicitly referencing herself as a Jew, function to position Midge’s persona as out-group in this particular context. The in/out-group distinction is emphasized when Midge makes a metonymous reference to stereotypical foods as representative of opposing cultures. Whereas we described Astrid’s usage of Yiddish as acutely gentile, here we might describe Midge’s usage as acutely (reformed) Jewish.

These dialogues illuminate Penelope Eckert’s notion of an indexical field, in which variables are of undetermined meaning until contextualized by speakers’ situations. In Midge’s case, *shutup* and *bialy* in these given situations are not only provocative because they are verbalized in a Catholic wedding context, but also because they are verbalized by a Jewish woman with agency. Though Midge’s comments would be shocking even in a current context, the uptight setting of a 1950’s social gathering heightens the divergence. In Astrid’s case, despite using a lexicon with great Jewish social indexical value, her distinctive Jewish linguistic repertoire comes across as lacking the refinement of socially normative usage. This ultimately prompts the viewer to consider *bracha* and *shayna punim* as regurgitations of memorized forms, verbalized in a kind of disarray. These selections of Yiddish loanwords function above all to demarcate the speakers meaningfully, whether aware or unaware of their ensuing in/out-group designations.

4.2 Inter-generational Usage of Yiddish Person Type Terms to Evoke Exterior Prejudice

Because *TMMM* consists of a multitude of age-generation related conflicts, instances of Yiddish loanwords in discourse between generations prove to offer distinct social indexical functions. Among person/type terms, particularly those categorized by Benor (2009) as *secretive/humorous/derisive ways of talking about non-Jews*, there is a tendency for the parental generation to employ such terms when speaking to the younger generation (often their own children) as evaluations of an object, or more abstractly, a concept evoked by the object. This is made apparent in the following dialogue between Midge and her mother, Rose. Midge began her involvement in stand-up comedy by supporting Joel, her soon ex-husband, as he tried to make it big (but failed). In this scene, Rose scrutinizes Joel and Midge’s involvement in comedy.

Dialogue 2: S1E1 “Pilot”

- 1 Rose: How did Joel’s little show go?
 2 Midge: It went very well.
 3 Rose: I still don’t understand this whole thing... Whom is he performing for?
 4 Midge: Anyone who shows up.
 5 Rose: And they pay you?
 6 Midge: They pass around a basket at the end of your set, and whatever’s in it you get to take home.
 7 Rose: If you need money, we can give you money.
 8 Midge: No, we don’t need money. Joel is funny, and he likes to do his comedy.
 9 Rose: How long are you going to be doing this, running around at night, taking money from strangers like a *schnorrer*?

Rose’s script is loaded with indirect speech acts: she uses diminutive “little” to negatively evaluate comedy [line 1], dismisses the activity out of hand by referring to comedy as “this whole thing” [line 3], asks Midge how long Joel will be doing “this” [line 9], and she even asks “whom is he performing for” [line 3], where the use of *whom* is an index of hyper-prescriptivism. Midge responds sincerely to insincere questions, furthering the mismatch in form and function of questions and answers. Rose loses composure when asking Midge how long she will be taking money from strangers like a *schnorrer* [line 9]. By using *schnorrer*, a term itself charged with class discrimination, Rose’s conception of comedy as a beggar’s career is at odds with Midge’s conception of comedy as light-hearted fun or a hobby. That being said, neither of them, in this dialogue at least, take comedy seriously. In this sense, they do find some alignment.

Rose’s usage of *schnorrer* is conventional: according to the JEL the most common users of this term are religious and middle-aged/older Jews, and the term is most often considered derisive (Benor 2012). Dialogue 2 exhibits a common stereotype in popular culture between a JAP and her mother: the common ground between mother and daughter is constructed around the mother’s imposition of certain social expectations (Waxmann 1988); and here, those social expectations are not being met. This tension is amplified by the historical setting of the series, a time of sought-after conformity, given the instability of wars and economic crises of preceding years. Even though Midge is written to be ahead of her time, Rose is very much in her time. Her character is madly neurotic and easily triggered by Midge’s nonconforming tendencies. If Midge’s involvement in the comedy scene is in the object role of a stance triangle, it seems that their opposing evaluations of the object are at the core of their overall divergent alignment, their divergent “intersubjectivity” (Du Bois 2007:140).

In “like a *schnorrer*”, it is notable that “like a...” followed by a negative Yiddish type term forms a comparative construction. In this way, “like a *schnorrer*” emphasizes boundaries and importantly, does not equate to Rose calling Midge a *schnorrer*. Du Bois’s notion of alignment on a continuum rather than on negative and positive poles is particularly relevant here (Du Bois 2007). The subliminal message in this usage of *schnorrer* is almost a plea to consider impending social consequences associated with stand-up comedy, specific to generational attitudes. As the dialogue progresses, and Rose’s evaluation become clearer, the focal point of the object as comedy shifts beyond just comedy, encompassing larger domains such as gender roles, class discrimination, and social status, all of which are again magnified by the historical time period.

It should be mentioned here as well that *TMMM* offers plenty of person/type Yiddish terms in dialogues that pattern similarly: in S1, E2, Moishe, Joel’s father, uses the term *schlemiel* as a way of reminding Joel that he is to thank for landing Joel a good job and not a *schlemiel* job; in S1, E5, Moishe asserts about Joel’s new fling: “she’s young, she’s emptyheaded, she doesn’t eat, she’s a *shiksa*”; and in S1, E1, Abe, Midge’s father, refers to Bryn Mawr, where Midge attended university, as “that fancy *goyische* college”. The role of *schnorrer* in Dialogue 2, along with the other examples of this function, exhibit the ambiguity between evaluations of the object in discourse and evaluations of larger associated meanings. By evaluating comedy with an associated person/type term, Rose positions herself as a conservative type contrary to that of a *schnorrer*.

However, *schnorrer*, as is the case with all Yiddish loanwords as variables in stylistic practices, gathers meaning based on its situated usage. In S2, E9, Midge is met with applause when asking her audience to donate to a telethon, addressing her viewers as “ya *schnorrers*”. Midge strives to be crude in a crude social sphere and, just as much, the audience expects a socially critical monologue. This instance exemplifies how the loanword functions to establish a persona, when Midge, a young, reformed Jew, uses *schnorrer* satirically and almost endearingly. As a viewer of *TMMM*, it is as if this instance stages an intertextuality of the former example between contrasting usages and repurposes of the loanword.

Rose's usage of *schnorrer* in the midst of divergent alignment is at odds with Midge's usage of *schnorrer* in a convergent alignment with her satisfied audience. While both cases situate the speaker in relation to Jewishness, Midge's usage in relation to not only Rose's usage but Moishe and Abe's alike, reveals the ways in which conventions are complicated by the younger generation. The consequences of this complication reach further than how these vocabularies are used inter-generationally, to how social concepts such as those having to do with *schnorrers* and *shiksas*² are being challenged by younger generations *intra*-generationally, as will be considered in Section 4.3. Whereas Dialogue 2 exemplified a Yiddish term evoking prejudice about exterior pressures larger than comedy itself, it might be the very prejudice surrounding derisive Yiddish loanwords that is challenged by younger-generational usage. Speakers are mutually aware of the social constructs, or denotations, of *schnorrer* and *shiksa* as low-class people or non-Jewish women, but the social significance regarding this common ground is perhaps at odds inter-generationally.

4.3 Younger Speakers' Appropriation of Conventional Usages

The last function explored is how younger speakers appropriate conventional uses of loanwords. These are instances in which younger generations implicate older Jewish types by the employment of non-type terms. This function often forges a converging alignment between intra-generational subjects and a bond over shared familial or cultural experiences. Dialogue 3 with Midge and her (at the time) boyfriend, Benjamin, demonstrates this function.

Dialogue 3: S2E6 "Let's Face the Music and Dance"

- 1 Benjamin: What'll you have? I'm buying.
- 2 Midge: The drinks are free.
- 3 Benjamin: Then I'm buying you two.
- 4 Midge: Gin martini, olives.
- 5 Bartender: Yes, ma'am.
- 6 Benjamin: So, did your table *plotz* at the sight of the Cossacks?
- 7 Midge: Oh, they *plotzed*. Didn't even *kvetch* first.
- 8 Benjamin: That Buzz is growing on me. He's got an edge.

This scene takes place in the dancehall at the Catskills summer resort, a Jewish summer retreat for children and adults alike. To briefly summarize Midge and Benjamin's relationship: they were blindly set up by their mothers, who as characters display extremely stereotypical "Jewish American Mother" behavior in their overbearing obsession with their children's romantic affairs (Waxmann 1988). From the very start of Midge and Benjamin's relationship, there was a shared familial experience, insofar that Benjamin eases the initial awkwardness [lines 1–5] by making reference to this commonality. After watching the resort's global-themed performance, Benjamin asks Midge how her family reacted to the Russian dance segment, or the "sight of the Cossacks" [line 6].

Judging from both tone and content, Benjamin's question [line 6] is disingenuous, and he uses *plotz* to further emphasize his insincerity. Form does not match function: Benjamin isn't actually curious if Midge's family burst at the sight of the Cossacks, but rather asserts this in a way that characterizes the older generation as reactive. Midge, in aligning with Benjamin, concurs that her table indeed *plotzed*, adding that before they could *kvetch*, they *plotzed* [line 7]. As viewers, we know that in reality Midge's table hardly reacted to the Russian dance scene, besides for Joel's mother, Shirley, who mumbled "who would bring Cossacks into a room full of Jews?" — but even that was objectively not a *plotz*, though possibly a *kvetch*.

The interconnected relationship between Yiddish loan-verbs and corresponding evoked person/types prompts the following questions: who *plotzes* and who *kvetches*? *Kvetch*, by definition, is the act of complaining about minor issues, and *plotz* expresses bursting or exploding from emotion (Benor 2012). The JEL classifies these terms as being used among pretty much all Jews with "diverse religious backgrounds and organizational involvements", suggesting that the usage in Dialogue 3 is conventional. However, both verbs contain semantics of emotional excess: overreacting by either complaining, whining, or bursting, despite conditions not meriting such passion. When these loanwords are in syntactic juxtaposition to "family" as the stance object, there is an interesting linkage between the meanings of the

² In the above referenced scene in S1, E5, Moishe (Joel's father) refers to Joel's girlfriend, Penny, as a *shiksa*, to which Joel responds by asking "so?". Without an attempt to deny that Penny is categorically a *shiksa*, Joel simply questions why it is a problem that she is a *shiksa*.

verbs and the emotional behaviors of their families. *Plotz* and *kvetch* are, in other words, linked to clichés of older Jews as fervent, which is advantageous to the subjects' intended convergent alignment.

In fact, we can compare *plotz* in Dialogue 3 with a contrastive use of *plotz* in S2, E4, in which the speaker is Benjamin's mom, Ida. While getting her hair done at the Catskills salon, she complains about her son to a friend: "If my son would just stay with a girl for more than two dates, I'd *plotz*". Ida's sincere use of *plotz* might just answer the question about "who *plotzes*". Yiddish terms, like *plotz*, correspond to a network of meanings and associations based on who is most likely to partake in the action of *plotzing*, or who is most likely to select the word *plotz* over, say, the English *explode*. In Benjamin's case, he uses this network of associated meanings to distance himself from the older generation, those who stereotypically *plotz*. Contrastively, Ida's usage does not seek to refer to an exterior person/type, but rather makes use of a shared lexicon with her exclusively Jewish friends.

In another dialogue between Midge and Lenny, a character based on the real Lenny Bruce, a similar pattern emerges. Though Lenny is Jewish, he represents a different type of Jew than Benjamin. Upon finding out about Midge's new boyfriend in S2, E5, Lenny exclaims: "You're kidding. You went to the Catskills and you bagged yourself a doctor? Your parents must be *kvelling!*". *Kvell*, similarly to *plotz* and *kvetch*, in Dialogue 3 makes inter-generational reference. Though it is the case with most Yiddish loanwords, the satirical usages of loanwords in the current section are blatant exercises of speaker design theory, where speakers perform and shift between variables in their speech to evoke a particular style (Schilling-Estes 2002).

This performativity by the speaker is also assisted by the productivity of Yiddish loanwords in their ability to move towards and away from conventions depending the speaker and context. Younger speakers using this function are like bricoleurs as they stage resistance: not resistance in a combative sense, but resistance established from the breaking of conformity, which functions by repurposing linguistic variables at hand. Initiated by some younger Jews that together share a lexicon and intra-generational Jewish experiences, there emerges a special repertoire to manage ideological separations from older Jews.

5 Discussion

The preceding situated meanings of Yiddish loanwords and their functionalities add to existing theories in third wave variation studies, as variables perform and construct the desired personae of the series' actors and creators. These results illustrate how theories of stancetaking might be used to analyze the indexicality of linguistic variables. Various functions of Yiddish loanwords as variables were found, which take part in social inclusion and differentiation (Giles and Ogay 2007). Three functions, as discussed in Section 4, emerged: (1) Yiddish loanwords as instances of disproportionate positioning to both accommodate an audience and emphasize the self, (2) inter-generational usages of Yiddish person/type loanwords to evoke exterior prejudices represented by the object in a stance triangle, and (3) younger speakers' appropriation of conventional usages of Yiddish loanwords to make use of a network of associated uses and users in an effort to socially distance inter-generationally. Although categorizing these functions makes methodological sense, categories should not be imagined as totally rigid. They ebb and flow, and likely there is never one sole function occurring in isolation at any given point.

To a passive viewer of *TMMM*, or to a viewer with little to no knowledge of Yiddish and American Jewish culture, the extent of Yiddish terms might be perceived as merely indirect and direct references to Jewish personae at a macro-level. Functionalities only become apparent when considering the interactional complexities of Yiddish loanwords as variables in processes of stylistic practice. The younger generation, demonstrated by Midge, Astrid, Benjamin, and Lenny Bruce, as well as the older generation, demonstrated by Rose, use loanwords in a functional way to point to micro-level meanings and statements.

Du Bois' assertion that "stance is more than the context-free connotations of words or sentences" is confirmed in all analyses (Du Bois 2007:146). Each utterance is contextually situated, and Yiddish terms facilitate and are informed by stance acts. On the one hand, loanwords take on meaning in their situated usages, pointing to an indexical field of possible meanings. On the other hand, they encode associations of constructed conventions, so situated and conventional meanings coalesce. Certainly this is the case when Midge refers to her audience at a comedy club as "ya *schnorrers*". Given Midge's situated context in an avant-garde, uncensored comedy club, disparaging terms and socially critical language are variables that contribute to a desired style, as well as her own position as an unconventional or unexpected user of such term. *Schnorrer* therefore remains disparaging and associated with an outsider demographic in that particular context, allowing Midge to intensify her social differentiation in both familial and stand-up social spheres.

Lastly, in Section 2.2, I proposed imagining visual annotations that take into account Yiddish loanwords' roles in the stance triangle. Perhaps we can contextualize such annotation as taking the shape of a superimposition, where the Yiddish term interacts with the underlying stance of discourse. Figure 2 exemplifies how this superimposition could

be sketched out for the dialogue in Section 4.1, as an example. *Bracha* facilitates stance and plays a significant role in positioning Astrid as a devout Jew and aligning the subjects. This unique relationship between the loanword and the dialogue which surrounds it can be imagined with such diagram. This idea in conjunction with emphasis to certain stance acts over others in the realm of Yiddish loanword usage may be a fruitful area of further study.

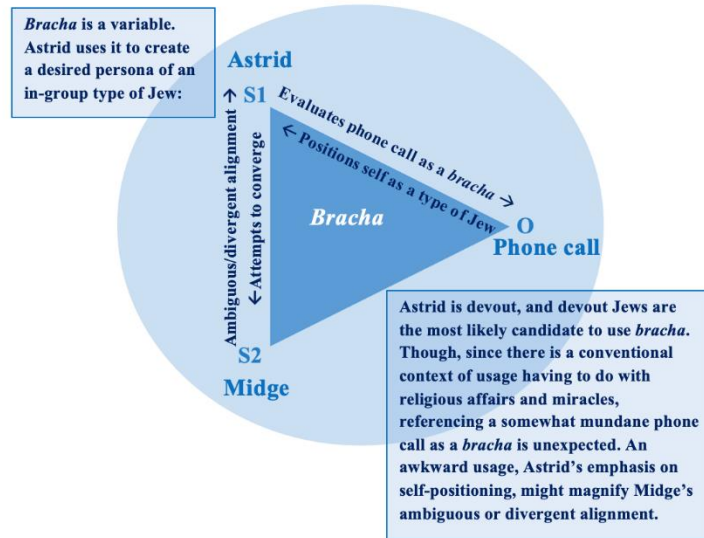


Figure 2: *Bracha* from Section 4.1 as a superimposition on top of Du Bois' (2007) stance triangle.

6 Conclusion

Through the analysis of representational language in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, this paper sought to extract sociolinguistic functions of Yiddish loanwords in American English discourse. As stancetakers grapple with their social situations and ever-changing styles, Yiddish loanwords as variables adopt distinct functions to reflect the stancetaker's goals in meaningful linguistic exchanges. Such functions, having to do with disproportionate self-positioning, inter-generational usages of Yiddish person/type terms to evoke exterior prejudices, and younger speakers' appropriation of conventional usages of Yiddish loanwords, extend beyond surface readings of Yiddish as merely underpinning Jewish social indexation. Rather, these observed functions of loanword usage engage in stylistic practice, involving the recruitment or the subversion of conventional and unconventional variables to establish personae.

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