No case for case (or gender) in Stamford Hill Hasidic Yiddish

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The main claim of this paper is that current day Yiddish as spoken by members of the Stamford Hill Hasidic (SHH) community has no notion of case and gender. At the same time, as we demonstrate, loss of case and gender is the result of substantial language change having taken place since World War II. Syntactic theory tells us that loss of case (and gender) distinctions in a language present a causal link to certain syntactic changes. For instance, in a VO language with no case distinctions one expects requirements of case adjacency (Neeleman & Weerman 1999). Lack of case distinctions can give rise to the loss of scrambling, as well as to the emergence of specific syntactic constructions, such as the double object construction involving VP-shells. As it will be demonstrated, there is reason to believe that the corresponding syntactic changes have indeed taken place in SHH Yiddish. This variety of evidence all points to the same conclusion, namely that SHH Yiddish is a language with no case or gender distinctions. In this respect it is similar to Modern English and unlike Standard Yiddish or the language of pre-World War II (Hasidic) Yiddish speakers. While this paper focuses on the language of the SHH community, our initial data from other Hasidic communities suggests that loss of case and gender is a general feature in the Hasidic communities worldwide. Krogh's (2012), Assouline's (2014) and Sadock & Masor's (2015) findings also mesh with this tentative conclusion. If this is true, we are looking at a pervasive case of language change within a mere 70 years, in fact shorter, as we will show. The implications of this for historical linguistics and sociolinguistics are considerable.