

balkons & die straszenbahn

cross language observations on The Shibboleth in yiddish, frisian and berlin dialect

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1.1 abstract

In this paper I want to explore shibboleth phenomena in germanic languages. I'll try to find evidence for shibboleth occurrences (which can describe words that are typical in certain registers AND provide the potential to appear differently in phonologic realisation or semantic expression depending on the speaker, making them behave as specific in-group markers) in yiddish and frisian language as well as in berlin vernacular.

1.2 inspiration

1.2.1 password parsley

The login to one of the protected pages of a random organisation connected with our university is often carried out using a process known as single sign-on. In this process, the username and password (our ZEDAT *credentials*) are not transmitted to the page we want, but only the confirmation from an instance such that our credentials are correct, i.e., that we have provided the instance (the “guardian”) the correct username and password to access the remote page (a corpus engine, a library portal, or generally a remote application on the network that only allows access to *affiliates* of certain educational institutions, e.g.) Both sides, guardian and repository, agree that we are only allowed access to the resources if we are who we claim to be. For example, a student at the FUB. Or a partisan. Or a member of a secret society. Or: a confidant of secrets. More precisely: a connoisseur of the SHIBBOLETH.

1.2.2 evidence

uljana wolf, etymologischer gossip: petersilie: one will no longer be able to use the word unreflected after reading about the 20,000 Haitian guest workers (cf. Wolf (2021)). The word petersilie – parsley – /perejil/ is needed as a means of access in order NOT to appear as a stranger to the community of natives = to fall victim to the massacre. Anyone who pronounces it [pεtɛχɪl] and not [pεrɛχɪl], as the locals do, will be murdered. So it is good to know the pronunciation. Or to master it.

Something similar, though less drastic, can happen to people who, to name just a few prominent examples, mispronounce derrida, bourdieu, accessoir or, to return to the subject, shibboleth (**שִׁבְבָּשׁ**, cf. Sefaria (2025)) or, to begin the queries, say [balko:n] instead of [balkon] and /tram/ instead of /straszenbahn/.

1.3 methods

Starting from a GPT provided bibliography (disclaimer: of which some entries appear already familiar... keywords: shibboleth, group identity, sociolinguistics), I'll dive into corpora provided and intend to consult speakers for their impressions. That may grow to a quantitative corpus based study or either be limited to a qualitative field investigation. I will not only search evidence in natural language but also in literature, which may be easier accessible.

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