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A discourse particle in two European minority languages: nu/no in Yiddish

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A discourse particle in two European minority languages: *nu/no* in Yiddish and Romani.

1. The languages, the forms, and the data corpora

Romani and Yiddish share a number of sociolinguistic and socio-historical features. Both are (or were) the vernacular languages of non-territorial European minorities. Their speakers are largely, if not exclusively, bilingual or multilingual. Knowledge of the languages is normally restricted to group-insiders, and bilingualism is unilateral. Institutional and literary uses of both languages are limited. In Yiddish, literacy has a long tradition, but it has usually been secondary to Hebrew, the liturgical language, or to the majority state language used in the context of formal and state institutions, or to both. In Romani, native-language literacy is very recent and largely limited to small circles of political activists and spontaneous usage on internal social networks. Yiddish, the language of Ashkenazic Jewry, diminished as a result of the Holocaust, the emigration of survivors, and subsequent linguistic assimilation among survivors who remained in central and eastern Europe after the Second World War. It is now largely confined to the communities of ultra-Orthodox or Hassidic Jews in a number of urban centres in the United States and Israel, as well as a few western European cities such as London, Manchester, and Antwerp. Romani, by contrast, is now probably the largest minority language in Europe, with upwards of 3.5 million speakers who are dispersed across the continent. The largest concentrations of speakers are found in Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Macedonia, but sizeable Romani-speaking communities exist throughout central and eastern Europe as well as in the United States, Argentina, Venezuela and elsewhere.

In this paper we focus on two discourse particles that share some similarities in structure and function, as well as in their historical background as borrowings from the surrounding majority languages: the particle *nu* in (East) Yiddish, and the particle *no* in the Romani dialect known as Kelderash/Lovari. So-called ‘East Yiddish’ refers to the vernacular language spoken by Ashkenazic Jews residing primarily in pre-war Slavic- and partly Hungarian- and Romanian-speaking territories. The term ‘East Yiddish’ is sometimes used in contrast to the historically related variety used

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1 It should be pointed out, however, that Yiddish was to a large extent mutually intelligible with the German dialects of German minorities, which constituted sizeable populations in pre-war eastern Europe.
predominantly in rural Jewish communities in the German-speaking regions up to the late nineteenth century, which some scholars have labelled ‘West Yiddish’. We prefer to use the label ‘Yiddish’, which is also the term used by the speakers, rather than ‘East Yiddish’. We prefer to define the now extinct Jewish varieties of Germany as ‘Judeo-German’ – reflecting their status as ethnolectal speech forms that were part of a continuum of closely related registers use alongside other local, regional, and formal varieties of German.

The Kelderasha and Lovara are two Romani ‘nations’ (sometimes referred to as ‘tribes’) that are very closely related in both their speech forms and in customs and social organization. They are both part of the so-called Northern Vlax group of Romani dialects, which formed in close contact with Romanian and partly also with Hungarian, in all likelihood in the Banat and southern Transylvanian regions after Romani immigrants from the southern Balkans settled there in the late fourteenth century. The Kelderasha still have a strong presence in these regions. The Lovara are settled primarily in the neighbouring regions of southern Hungary. Both populations have so-called ‘diaspora’ communities across Europe and the Americas. They emerged when Roms emigrated from Romania in the second half of the nineteenth century, in part during the aftermath of the abolition of Romani serfdom in Wallachia and Moldavia.

Our data on Yiddish derive from a corpus of biographical narrations recorded between 1988-89 in Israel among speakers who were born and raised in Poland, Romania, and the Baltic lands, as well as speakers who belong to the Hassidic community in Israel and whose ancestors emigrated from central or eastern Europe (for an extensive discussion see Reershemius 1997). The corpus consists of 46 recordings covering roughly 44 hours of spoken data. Ten longer biographical narrations (1:24 hours) from the corpus are available as published transcriptions (Reershemius 1997) and were consulted for the present paper. The Romani data derive from a corpus of recordings mainly of biographical narrations but also including a 45-minute political speech and a 20-minute contribution to a political discussion. The material was collected in northern Germany during 1990-1991 among members of an extended family whose branches are spread between Transylvania, Poland, Austria, and Sweden. Some of them define themselves as ‘Kelderasha’, others as ‘Lovara’, but their respective dialects show only minor differences, most of which are largely idiosyncratic or representative of variation among nuclear families or family branches rather than of any major dialectal isoglosses (for

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2 The recordings can be accessed via the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna (http://www.phonogrammarchiv.at/wwwnew/).
a discussion see Matras 1994). The transcriptions consulted for the present paper represent 3:31 hours of recordings from seven different speakers.³

The frequencies of Yiddish *nu* and Romani *no* in the two corpora differ considerably. Only six of the ten Yiddish speakers used *Nu* at least once, and the number of overall occurrences in the transcribed corpus is sixteen. By contrast, all the Romani speakers used *no* and the total number of occurrences in the corpus of transcription is 153. Even when adjusting the figures to the difference in the number of hours of recording, the frequency of *no* in the Romani corpus is still considerably higher than that of *nu* in the Yiddish corpus. But since Romani *no* is more frequent in biographical narration than in the more institutionalised forms of discourse contained in the speech and the debate, a case can be made for an even greater difference in distribution. One of our aims in the following is to elucidate the meanings and functions of the two forms in a way that might also account for the heavier reliance of Romani speakers on *no*, while at the same time to clarify why the comparison between two words in two different languages is justified in the first place.

Yiddish and Romani are always contiguous with other languages, as their speakers do not constitute the majority population in any given region, and since they tend to reside in dispersed communities that are either linguistically mixed or in proximity to settlements in which other languages are spoken. Both languages offer interesting case studies of contact-induced language change, and the appearance of *nu* and *no* may well be one such case. The particle *no* in Kelderash and Lovari Romani is shared with similar words in the contact languages Slovak, Czech, Hungarian, and Polish, which have played a role in the recent linguistic history – over the past three to four generations – of the families of the speakers considered in our corpus. The particle is usually absent from Romani dialects that are spoken outside central and eastern Europe, for example in the Romani dialects of the southern Balkans, southern Italy, France or Finland, and there is no reason to assume that it was part of the shared legacy of Early Romani (Byzantine period) or even Proto-Romani (pre-European period) (for the concepts see Matras 2002). The origins of Yiddish *nu* are less obvious. It is often assumed to derive from Russian, which has a similar particle *nu*, or even from Polish, which has the form *no* that might be regarded as functionally similar (see for example Rosten 1968: 271). But there are also similar usages of the forms *nu* and *nå* in various Germanic languages and German dialects, and one cannot exclude that Yiddish *nu* could also have developed within the Germanic component of the language, prior to contact with Slavic, and that it may have subsequently converged with a form in the Slavic contact languages that was similar in structure and function.

³ For a brief sample recording with transcription see [http://languagecontact.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/ELA/languages/Romani.html](http://languagecontact.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/ELA/languages/Romani.html).
Lexicographic coverage of Romani is recent and fairly fragmented, reflecting the large diversity of dialects and the absence of any established literary tradition. The multi-dialect lexical database RomLex (http://romani.uni-graz.at/romlex/) has no attestation of no in Kelderash Romani, but translates no in Lovari as “now, well (introductory particle)”. Dictionaries of Yiddish tend to define nu as an interjection. Harkavy (1898) lists the meanings ‘Now! Well! On! Onward!’, as well as ‘indeed, yes’. Weinreich (1968) translates nu as ‘Go on! Well? On!’ and Rosten (1968) gives ‘well, well now’. Some descriptions of Judeo-German also mention nu. Beem (1967) describes its function in the speech of the Jews of the Low Countries as a question particle that is also used for contrastive purposes. Its origin may well be Yiddish, which influenced the Judeo-German speech of Jews in the Netherlands, especially in the Amsterdam region. In areas where Low German was the principal contact vernacular, nu remains unattested or at least unmentioned for Judeo-German varieties (e.g. Weinberg 1973; see also Reershemius 2007), most likely due to the presence of an identical particle nu in Low German.\(^4\)

2. A note on the theoretical approach

Both markers appear to be products of community bilingualism and language contact. The case for borrowing can be made clearly for Romani no, while for Yiddish nu at the very least a case be made for some degree of functional convergence with similar forms in the contact languages. A key issue to consider in our discussion is the trigger for their replication from the surrounding language in the community languages in which they are now used. We assume that contact-induced change is functionally motivated by bilingual speakers’ negotiation of both cognitive and social factors involved in organising discourse in bilingual settings. From a cognitive perspective, it is apparent that some functional categories are more susceptible both to contact-induced change as well as to speech production errors in language selection (see Matras 1998, 2009). For a number of categories, including connectors, diachronic hierarchies of borrowing now seem to be well established and universally proven (cf. Matras 1998, 2007). This suggest that semantic-pragmatic factors, rather that formal-structural features, are responsible for triggering borrowing. From the social perspective, the question arises whether speaker communities are willing to license the replication in the community language of certain material from the contact language more so than that of other structures.

Three principal arguments have been put forward in connection with the ‘matter replication’ or word-form borrowing of discourse markers in bilingual settings. Poplack (1980) had suggested that

\(^4\) See Doornkaat Koolmann (1882), who defines Low German nu as an emphatic question particle and interjection.
it is the relative structural simplicity of discourse markers along with their sentence-peripheral position that facilitates the replication of discourse markers from a majority language in the home language of minority speakers. This replication is in turn, according to Poplack, socially motivated by the need felt by less fluent bilinguals to flag bilingual competence, motivated by the prestige attributed to bilingualism in an immigrant community. By contrast, Maschler (1994) regarded language mixing around discourse markers as bilinguals’ way of exploiting the full potential of their linguistic resources in order to use the juxtaposition of languages to flag boundaries between content units in discourse. Switching around discourse markers is thus regarded as discourse-strategic, capitalising on bilinguals’ awareness of the contrast of languages. Such use of the contrast function of language mixing may, it is argued, become a permanent resource in the idiolect of bilingual speakers in certain communication settings, leading to what Maschler has termed a bilingual ‘emergent grammar’.

Matras (1998, 2000) takes a different approach to the issue of language change and bilingual discourse markers. The crucial aspect here is the actual inclusion of a diachronic analysis, which identifies discourse markers as universally susceptible to a diachronic process of borrowing in language contact situations, normally from the majority language into the domestic or oral language of a minority population, or from a literary or administrative prestige language into vernacular varieties. This process results in what is in effect a ‘fusion’ of the structures responsible for managing the utterance in the bilinguals’ two languages, thus eliminating the potential to use the contrast of language as a meta-languaging strategy to flag contrast and boundaries among units of talk. A further dimension that Matras (1998, 2000) adds to the discussion is evidence that language selection errors around discourse markers occur with a notable regularity. They occur even in settings in which it is quite obvious that the bilingual speakers who produce them have no discourse capital to gain from language mixing and so no strategic advantage, for example in instances where bilinguals are communicating with a monolingual listeners or audiences. While most selection errors around discourse markers will either go unnoticed or be ignored or self-repaired, the more intriguing settings are those where bilinguals adopt a casual tolerance toward mixing and the use of discourse markers from a surrounding, dominant language becomes an unmarked option. Initially they are employed alongside items of similar or comparable functions in the home language, as variants, and this can be observed in the idiolects as well as community speech forms of bilinguals even within the first generation of contact. In many cases, we find that borrowed discourse markers have completely replaced the inventory of inherited word forms in this domain. In these cases, bilinguals thus have just one single inventory of discourse marking word forms.
This gives rise to the assumption that diachronic change around discourse markers, i.e. long-term borrowing or ‘fusion’, is not the result of strategic language mixing, but rather of a cognitive difficulty in keeping apart two distinct sets of discourse markers and subjecting them to constant selection and inhibition to accommodate to the appropriate language choice that the interaction setting requires. The generalisation of just one set of discourse markers across a bilingual’s repertoire of linguistic resources thus has an advantage in terms of the economy of language processing, without disturbing the integrity in principle of the demarcation between languages in that repertoire. Language change and the borrowing of discourse markers is the outcome of precisely such a generalisation that has become widespread and licensed within a speech community.

The question remains, how the contact-susceptibility of discourse markers helps us understand the processing functions that their employment triggers in discourse. Matras (1998) has referred to discourse markers and other ‘utterance modifiers’ (including fillers and tags, which some authors would not count as discourse markers in the strict sense, as well as focus particles) as part of a monitoring-and-directing apparatus. This is a demanding cognitive function through which the speaker not only guides the listener to process the connections among content units, but simultaneously also monitors the listener’s reactions and anticipates them. In this respect, discourse markers a kind of verbalised gesture, one that is often an automated, reflex-conditioned response to communicative circumstances rather than the product of an analytical processing procedure.

With this in mind, we will consider the role of nu/no as verbalised gestures in conversational interaction. This is based firstly on a conversation-analytical approach to discourse as a sequence of actions (e.g. Schegloff 2007), and furthermore on a functional-pragmatic approach that views grammatical operators essentially as triggers of mental processing tasks that enable the transfer and evaluation of knowledge and information between the speaker and the listener (e.g. Ehlich 2007, Redder 2008). The analysis of operators must therefore be tightly embedded into the interpretation of speaker routines in organising communicative interaction (Rehbein 1977). Within the scope of the present paper, we deal primarily with biographical narration, with just a single example from a political speech where the relevant activity is argumentation. In most of the examples, the action sequences described represent either the chaining of events that the speakers reconstruct in their narratives, or the elicitation, by interlocutors, of clarification on events as well as elicitation of event narration itself.

In this context we encounter two principal functions of nu/no: In the first, the marker acts as what has sometimes been described as a ‘continuer’ (Schegloff 1968, 1986; cf. also Maschler 2009: 59ff.). Schegloff’s approach to ‘continuers’ emphasises their role in indicating that a unit of talk is not yet complete and that the action of completing it therefore needs to be continued. Schiffrin (1988)
offers a differentiated analysis that distinguishes between the role of connectors at several levels: the ideational level at which information content is organised, the actional level at which the speaker’s own organisation of talk takes place, and the exchange level, at which the interaction-oriented roles of speaker and listener are negotiated. This multi-dimensional approach is controversial. The functional-pragmatic tradition (Rehbein 1989, Redder 1989) tends to take an integrated view of connectors and discourse particles, seeking to identify inherent functions of each marker that are described in terms of the mental processing tasks that they trigger. Thus a typical conjunction such as ‘and’ is regarded as a combination of tasks by Schiffrin, who assigns to it an enhancing function at the idea or content level, an additive function at the action level, and a continuative function at the exchange level. Both Rehbein and Redder attribute to ‘and’ an inherent function of reviewing a category of knowledge the verbalising of which has been initiated earlier in the sequence, with a view toward announcing that this category has not yet been completed. While at face level this sounds similar to the notions of content-enhancement and addition, it is in fact proposed that ‘continuers’ inherently entail a revision of a preceding action and thus have a backwards-oriented, recapitulation function, and not just one that simply points toward further progression. Redder’s (1989) analysis shows how additive connectors of the type ‘and’, when embedded into a turn-alternation sequence, in fact serve as prompts to the listener to continue and thereby review and possibly revise an overarching category of information that has been initiated and thus ‘opened’, but not yet fully verbalised.

This brings us to the second principal function attested for nu/no, which is that of a prompt. Maschler (2009: 41ff.), in her discussion of nu in Israeli Hebrew, identifies several different roles of the marker: inviting a participant in the interaction to continue a turn, hastening a participant to get on with a non-verbal action, urging further (verbal) development of a topic by encouraging a move on to the next episode in a narration, and granting permission to perform an action. All these functions can be summarised according to Maschler (2009: 69) as a “degree of encouragement to proceed with an action” and thus primarily of sequential value in the organisation of discourse. Maschler proposes an underlying process of grammaticalisation that leads from what is regarded as an ‘impolite’ use of nu as an impatient prompt that speakers use to interfere with interlocutor’s actions, to a more neutral encouraging signal which primarily maps the continuity aspect of the action sequence. In Hebrew discourse, this latter function is associated primarily with humour and provocation, and Maschler argues that it is this aspect of ‘key’ that helps neutralise the impatience that is associated with the marker. Israeli Hebrew nu of course derives from the use of nu in the speech of Jewish immigrants to Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, who were mainly native speakers of Yiddish and Russian, and it seems obvious that the marker was integrated into Hebrew during the
vernacularisation process of the language (so-called ‘revival’) when it was spoken initially as a second language.

In contrast to Schiffrin’s multi-level approach to discourse markers that affords equal consideration to content, action and exchange, for Maschler (2009) it is the role of discourse markers in organising interaction among participants that occupies centre stage. This is captured by the concept of ‘meta-languaging’:

“Generally when we use language, we look through it at a world we believe to exist beyond language. However, we can also use language in order to look through it at the process of using language itself. … I investigate here this latter process of metalanguage – using language in order to communicate about the process of using language. Metalanguage, I argue, is the semantic-pragmatic process which is at the heart of both the employment and grammaticalization … of discourse markers” (Maschler 2009: 1).

In the specific analysis of Hebrew nu Maschler suggests that we are dealing with the grammaticalisation of meta-languaging function; in other words, what starts off as a prompt urging a participant to take action, verbal or non-verbal, thus functioning across turn boundaries, is in diachronic perspective extended to the internal level of the discourse, organising sequences within the speaker’s own turn and ultimately making evaluative statements about the relations between moves in the discourse and so in practice on the relations between content units.

We shall see below that the data on nu/no in Yiddish and Romani show that the majority of uses relate to continuation, and only some to prompts. Whether prompts are a kind of residual function that carries forward an original use, or whether they are in fact derived from discourse-internal function, remains to be decided, and we shall return to this point in the concluding remarks. It is noteworthy that Romani no displays an even more ‘grammaticalised’ – that is, an abstract, non-lexical meaning that figures at a very subtle level of interaction management – namely the use of the marker as a tag. Some scholars, like Schiffrin (1988), do not consider tags as part of the canonical inventory of discourse markers, but this view is not shared by all (cf. for instance Fraser 1990). We are not concerned with breaking down the functions of markers in to separate domains of content, action and exchange, but regard them instead as integrated operations whose role in regulating action structure is inherent rather than derived. Tags, to follow Rehbein (1979), constitute precisely such regulating devices that ‘augment’ the speech action with a view toward eliciting tacit confirmation and thus conveying affirmation. Clearly, however, this is a distinct employment of no, quite different from its role as prompt or even as continuer.

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This brings us to the question of whether an invariable meaning can be identified for each of the two language-specific markers with which we deal in this paper. The question is of general theoretical relevance to any functional analysis in linguistics. In order to answer it, we need to define the dimensions within which meaning can be identified as steady or constant, and where exactly usage is merely context-derived. We draw on a further concept developed with the Functional Pragmatics tradition: Not all the knowledge that is required for successful communication in a communicative setting is actually verbalised. Discourse markers play a vital role in negotiating verbalised and non-verbalised elements of discourse knowledge. We include in our analysis of *nu/no* as discourse markers a distinction between speaker-related and listener-related linguistic procedures (cf. Rehbein 1979). The first support the explicit verbalisation of propositional content. The second call on the listener to supplement non-verbal (imaginary, presupposed or inferred) knowledge in order to be able to fully contextualise the proposition that is being presented. The distinction between speaker- and listener-related operational procedures is typically represented by an opposition of structures: for example, Rehbein (1992) identifies the presence of a constituent in the position preceding the finite verb in German declarative clauses as speaker-related, with the speaker providing an explicit perspective for the predication through verbalised material. By contrast, the absence of a constituent, that is, verb-initial word order in (spoken) German declarative clauses is regarded as a listener-oriented procedure that challenges the listener to mentally supplement the missing perspective by drawing on relevant contextual knowledge, thus lending the construction its ‘consequential’ reading (for similar applications of the distinction see Reershemius 2001 on Yiddish word order and Matras 1995 on word order in Romani). For *nu/no*, we determine the nature of the marker in terms of speaker- and hearer-related procedures by correlating its role with structural attributed such as its position in the utterance and its prosodic properties. Rather than follow what we regard as a somewhat artificial separation – for the kind of marker in question – of action sequence, content presentation, and negotiation of participant roles, we try and identify the function of *nu/no* in terms of the action structure and the action goal, mapping the various structural attributes of the two markers’ distribution to these key aspects.

The question also arises whether it makes sense to propose a more general, cross-linguistic typology for *NU/NO*, at least for the two languages discussed here, and perhaps for related or similar forms in other languages. Here we return to the issue of the areal dimension and the contact-susceptibility of the markers *nu/no*. Even in the absence of clear-cut evidence of a shared etymology and/or grammaticalisation paths, there is evidence that the two markers have similar forms and functions, which in turn they appear to share with other contiguous languages. An in-depth discussion of the areal dimension surrounding *nu/no* is beyond the scope of this paper. But we take the
opportunity to draw attention to the special circumstances of two languages in contact in situations of unidirectional bilingualism, that share markers with similar shape and apparently some comparable functions, which are also shared with the respective contact languages and other languages of the region. We hope to show that this dimension justifies a combined typology of the functions of the markers, one that might be applied to further case studies involving some of the contiguous languages.

3. The marker nu in Yiddish

The following analysis is based on ten biographical narrations (1:24 hours) by speakers of Yiddish who live in Israel (Reershemius 1997). All of them speak Israeli Hebrew, which they acquired as adults, apart from one speaker, who grew up with both languages. The bilingual aspect makes it necessary to take into consideration the functions of Hebrew nu. Maschler (2003: 92) describes Hebrew nu as a borrowing from Yiddish or Russian, which gained specific new meanings and functions in Israeli Hebrew. According to Maschler (2003, 2009) casual interaction in Hebrew can be characterized by a certain degree of impatience. The discourse marker nu is used in this context in order to hasten along both verbal and non-verbal action. Maschler identifies a number of sequential functions for nu: It can signal a speaker’s urge to continue or to move on in the development of a topic. By applying nu in discourse the speaker may grant the listener permission to perform certain actions (Maschler 2003: 110). The keying function of nu draws on these sequential meanings when the marker is employed for joking or provocation purposes.

In Example (1), nu draws attention to a gap of knowledge on the speaker’s side and forms an interruption in the narration flow. The speaker (H) is male, born in 1917 in Sokolov-Podlaski (Poland). He immigrated to Israel in 1941.

(1)

a. H: Ober in derzelber tsayt • iz antshtanen • di falsh- meshikhishe baveygunk •• fin • ee • nu, vi hot er gehaysn, a polak.
b. L: Shab / Shabtay Tsvi?
c. H: Shabs/ Neyn! Nukh zhe / nukh Shabtay Tsvi! Nu!
d. L: Yakov …
e. H: Yankev B / ee • ee Yankev, Yankev Frank!
a. H: But at the same time • emerged • the pseudo-Messianic movement •
of • ee • NU, what was his name, a Pole.
b. L: Shab / Shabtay Tsvi?
c. H: Shabs/ No! After / after Shabtay Tsvi! NU!
d. L: Yakov …
e. H: Yankev B / ee • ee Yankev, Yankev Frank!

In example (1) the narrative flow is interrupted because the speaker cannot recall the name of a character central to his story, in this case the notorious Jakob Frank who declared himself to be the messiah in the 18th century. Nu is used in this context as an indicator to the listener that a central piece of information is missing. This is underlined by the following question, which is partly addressed to the listener but mainly to the speaker himself. The listener, however, takes the question for what it is and tries to come up with an answer by listing self-proclaimed messiahs, starting with Shabtaj Tsvi. This offer is rejected, followed by another nu!, this time clearly in exclamatory mode. The speaker is mainly appealing to himself – rather impatiently – to finally come up with the missing piece of information. The listener, once again, continues her efforts to oblige and can finally supply the correct first name, Yakov, which triggers the speaker’s memory to kick in and come up with the required name, Yankev Frank. Nu is used in example (1) at a meta-level of communication after the speaker had been forced to leave the narrative continuum because he could not remember a piece of information vital for his story. Nu is applied in two ways: as an indicator to the listener that the narrative flow has been interrupted, and as an element of self-appeal to the speaker through which he challenges himself. This use of nu has been observed by Maschler (2003) for Israeli Hebrew, the main contact language of speaker A.

In relation to the dimensions of analysis outlined above, we might characterise nu in Example (1) as a speaker’s self-prompt, carrying with it an implicit but weak listener-prompt (as the listener is tacitly invited to join the speaker in the search for the missing expression/name). In its distribution, nu appears in similar functions both in turn-internal position (segment a.), where it is characterised once by a declarative pitch, and in turn-final position (segment c.), where it is accompanied by a more emphatic, exclamatory pitch.

In the following example (2), the same speaker applies nu for the purpose of resumption following a gap in his knowledge and a request for information:
Here too, speaker H fails to remember a detail of his story, in this case the name of the German town where Jakob Frank is buried. The listener tries to help but neither participant is able to come up with the missing piece of information. Speaker H resumes his narrative by applying *nu* as a refocusing particle (segment e.) followed by the additional *nisht vikhtik* ‘not important’. In effect, H is using *nu* as a tool to dismiss the preceding gap in the flow of the story (deriving from his memory lapse in relation to a relevant detail) and to prompt a return to the main story line. At the content or information level, his use of *nu* in this example is quite different from that in Example (1): it does not support a procedure aimed at retrieving missing information, but rather signals a ‘move-on’ strategy intended to prevent the absence of relevant information from impeding the continuation of the narration sequence. What is common to the two modes of use of *nu* in examples (1) and (2) is not any information-level processing, but rather a gesture that comes in response to a critical point in the unfolding of the turn structure, which calls on the listener to lend mental support to the speaker in his determination to allow his action to progress.

In Example (3), the speaker W is female, born in 1928 near Vilnius (Lithuania). She immigrated to Israel in 1949.
The speaker tells the harrowing story of how her father was murdered by German soldiers during the Second World War. She interrupts her story to see how her (German) interviewer is coping, and says – almost in an apologetic tone – ‘Iz a bisl …’ ‘This is a little…’. She does not complete the sentence, avoiding a precise, verbalised evaluation of the preceding content. The insertion of nu in segment e., following the incomplete (non-verbalised) but implied evaluation, signals that agreement must be reached to move on and away from a critical point in the action sequence. The marker almost takes the place of an evaluative comment. But unlike nu in example (1), it is not a prompt for a search procedure targeting an item for the purpose of verbalisation. Quite to the contrary, it indicates that content might be agreed on that does not require verbalisation. In its internal structure, nu in (3), just like the forms in the previous examples, prompts a go-ahead in the action structure. Contextually it anchors this prompt not in a need to supplement content verbally, but rather in a realisation that non-verbalised knowledge concerning the evaluation of the content is shared, and this allows the participants to move on. Here, nu constitutes an independent move, a self-contained utterance, and a commentary by the speaker that relates to shared discourse knowledge.

In our final Yiddish example (4), the speaker K is male and was born in 1904 in Warsaw (Poland). He immigrated to Israel in 1973:
In example (4) the speaker recalls how a social worker, a member of the Jewish ‘Bund’ organisation, assures him that his two small, sickly children would be admitted free of charge into a clinic operated by the Bund. He tells his story mainly by reciting the dialogue between the social worker and himself. In segment b. he takes on the external narrator perspective, ahead of reciting his anxious reaction to the fact that he is likely to be separated from his children for the duration of their stay at the clinic. The comment is prefaced by nu, which picks up the preceding context and uses it as an anchor and departure point for the upcoming quotation. Here, nu is resumptive in its backwards orientation toward the preceding propositional content, and continuing in acting as an introductory particle for the commentary that follows. In this way it contributes to sequencing portions of the story content by mapping them onto individual actions of talk, which together constitute the narration line. The marker thus acts as a connector. It occupies the initial position in the utterance and is followed by a short pause. Its function as a prompt is at most residual, and it is tightly embedded into the speaker’s own plan for structuring the story line and the individual actions that make up his current turn.

3. The marker no in Kelderash/Lovari Romani

The data considered here come from speakers who were recorded in northern Germany between 1989-1993. Three generations of the same extended family were born and raised in different countries, but tend to share the same multilingual repertoire, albeit with varying degrees of proficiency. The oldest generation was born in the Romanian-Slovak border region and raised in Czechoslovakia and Poland. The intermediate generation was born in Poland and raised in Sweden.
and in Germany, and the youngest were born in Germany and Austria. Romani is the principal language of the home and extended family events, while German is the principal language outside the home, and Polish is considered a kind of heritage language that symbolises the family’s specific experience and history. Insertions from both Polish and German are commonplace in Romani discourse within the family. Swedish is known to various degrees by the speakers, but used predominantly in interactions that surround visits to family members in Sweden (with whom the principal language of interaction is always Romani). It is noteworthy that the distribution of no does not seem to correlate at all with the speakers’ proficiency and usage patterns of Polish, which has an identical marker in very similar functions (see below, section 4). One of the speakers of the younger generation, P (example 12), has only rather rudimentary and passive knowledge of Polish, yet shows pretty much the same token frequency of no with similar distribution to that of the other speakers. Speaker S, of the intermediate generation, understands Polish and is able to used it actively, but does so only very rarely, and her exposure to Polish centres primarily around interaction in Romani into which her interlocutors insert Polish phrases and expressions. She too uses no very frequently, and in functions that are quite similar to some of those attested for Polish no. The other speakers, W of the older and M of the intermediate generation, are fluent in Polish, but their use of no does not show any significant difference either in frequency or in distribution and function to that of the other speakers. We can therefore conclude that no is firmly integrated into the Romani speech of this particular community.

3.1 Connective functions and speaker continuation
In the context of example (5), speaker S of the intermediate generation is being asked by the interviewer to tell him about her family history. The example documents the beginning of her narrative, where she identifies her own lineage:

(5)

a. S: Hm, astaras katar o muro dad.

b. Leski dei si anda Rusija.

c. Laki dej si anda xoraxane Rom.

d. Also, muri pra-mami, si anda xoraxane Rom.

e. Lako dad sas Kelderari.

Tja, aj von bešenas ande Rusija taj von trainas anda kodo ke muzika kerenas, khelenas, na.

No, taj kothar avile angla marimo, o angluno marimo faima akana sas, avile anda e Rusija ande Polska.
a. S: Hm, let’s start with my father.
b. His mother is from Russia.
c. Her mother descended from Turkish Rom.
d. That is, my great-grandmother is from the Turkish Rom.
e. Her father was a Kelderari.
Right, and they lived in Russia and they made a living by making music, they were musicians, right.
g. NO, and that’s where they came from before the war, I think it was before the first war, they came from Russia to Poland.

Note that German discourse particles – such as also and tja, both identified in the transcription in italics as insertions from the principal contact language – appear very frequently in this speaker’s discourse. More examples of such insertions will be encountered below. This is a typical feature of the speech of this particular speaker. The others may at times insert German lexical items, but they rarely employ German discourse particles. We might therefore consider the introduction of German discourse particles to be a case of emerging fusion of discourse organising procedures at the idiolectal level. The uninhibited and almost wholesale adoption of the inventory of German particles into her discourse is licensed by the speaker herself, but evidently accepted by her peers, and so it does not stand out as any kind of foreign flavour that characterises her speech.

The function of no in segment g. is followed by a short pause, and can be defined as connective: It immediately follows a chain of utterances which contain a gradual build-up of pieces of information about the speaker’s ancestors and their occupations and places of residence. The marker resumes the cumulative content of this chain of utterances. It makes this content the point of departure and the perspective for an evaluative summary statement about the family and its origins. In this role, no thus indicates a very specialised form of connectivity. It is resumptive, referring backwards and bringing verbalised knowledge back into focus. It is at the same time forward-oriented, highlighting the content that it introduces as evaluative in nature, and thus dependent on the assumption that a harmonious accord has been established between the speaker and the listener in regard to the preceding content.

A rather similar use of no by the same speaker can be found in the next example. Here, S is talking about a dark chapter in the history of the Roms in Scandinavia, when social services followed a policy of taking Romani children away from their families and into state-run care homes, claiming that Romani parents were untrustworthy and unable to serve as role models for good citizenship:
(6)
a. S: Ale lenas lendar e šavoren, tradenas le ande heimuri.
b. Vi la line sas kothe, Katici line la.
c. A voj barilas but vrama ande gaže, ande heimuri halt, na?
d. No, vi kothe nas mišto e Romenge.

a. S: But they took away their children, they sent them to homes.
b. They took her away her, Katici, they took her.
c. And she grew up among non-Gypsies, in homes, like, right?
d. NO, there too things were not good for the Roms.

In example (6) segment d., no brings the content of a preceding chain of utterances into focus. Here too, the summary statement conveys an evaluative commentary. Having shared information about events with the listener, the speaker is able to use common ground in d. in order to introduce an overall evaluative commentary about the situation of the Roms in that period, in that location.

Note that the short pause that follows no is characteristic of the marker’s role in introducing evaluative comments of this kind. By contrast, a pause is absent in the following example. Here, speaker S is recounting an event from her childhood. During the time when the family lived in caravans, family members would use basins to wash outdoors. The episode relates to the mysterious disappearance of a bar of soap:

(7)
a. S: Phenav: "Mamo, me či lem les", kukola phenen "Mamo me či lem les".
b. No kon šaj čorel o sapui, ke naj kathe konik!
c. No či avile mule te čoren o sapui, na.

a. S: I say: "Mom, I didn’t take it", the other say: "Mom, I didn’t take it".
b. NO who could have taken the soap, because there’s nobody there!
c. NO no ghosts have come to take away the soap, right.

Here, no is used in two subsequent utterances as a chaining device. It is somewhat similar to the use found in examples (5)-(6), where preceding content is re-focussed as the point of departure for the
next utterance. But there is no pause, and unlike the marker’s role in example (5)-(6), in (7) it does not introduce an overall evaluation. Instead, it signals a sequence of local assessments drawn on the basis of the information provided in each of the preceding utterances. In segment b. it introduces a conclusion: Everybody had denied taking the soap, and therefore the reason for its disappearance remains unknown. In segment c., no introduces a justification for that conclusion: The reason for the disappearance of the soap is unknown (segment b), since it is impossible to assume that it was a ghost who had taken it (segment c).

Our next example comes from a political speech held at an assembly of Romani political activists. The speaker M, of the intermediate generation, is discussing outsiders’ attitudes toward the Roms and the double standards used by outsiders to judge Romani culture:

(8)

b. Ame sam nomaduri kaj lošas ke/ tradas.
d. No von trajin kaver trajo.

a. M: They go away on holiday, and they expel us.
b. We are nomads who are happy to trav/ to travel.
c. Because they know about themselves that when the are sitting beside a bonfire and playing their music, they’re enjoying life.
d. NO they live a different life.

The speaker’s use of no in segment d. is quite similar to the speaker-continuation, resumption and inference-deriving role of no in segment c. of the previous example (7) from a biographical narration. However, the type of discourse accounts for the difference between the two uses. Whereas speaker S’s use of no in (7) serves to introduce an inference-based conclusion and then an inference-based justification for that conclusion, in (8), in the context of a pre-planned and tightly organised (and even

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5 Reference to ghosts is common in Romani culture. They are called mule, literally ‘the dead’, and are depicted as the souls of deceased relatives who continue to follow their living relations on their journeys.
partly scripted)⁶ speech, the inference is part of carefully crafted rhetorical structure, which the speaker uses to present an argument. It is thus the overall character of the discourse that lends this particular use of no its argumentative function. Note that the resumption of preceding content that is being introduced here with no has a contrasting effect. The lifestyle of the non-Roms is juxtaposed to that of the Roms, in order to dismiss outsiders’ impressions of Romani culture as unrealistic. In the process, no takes the preceding statement as a point of departure in order to introduce a contrasting state of affairs that constitutes the speaker’s principal argument, namely that outsiders are unable to, and refuse to understand the Roms.

In (9) we encounter another instance of connective no, here too in utterance-initial position, serving as a chaining device and supporting the speaker’s continuation of a chain of tightly integrated assertions. So far, we have seen no signal a departure from the depiction of events and a shift toward an evaluative commentary, an argument or a conclusion. In (9), however, no is a chaining device at the strict level of a succession of utterances depicting a sequence of real-life events:

(9)
a. S: Aj phenav: "Sostar sas pe late sa rat?"

b. No phenel kam kothe si Veterinär vaj doktoro żukljengo vaj kesë/
   kesavo vareso, taj kerde operacija vorta tu avilan pe kodo.

a. S: And I say: "Why was she covered in blood?"

b. NO she says maybe there is a veterinary there or an animal doctor or
   some/ something like that, and they carried out an operation just as you arrived there.

The residual contrastive meaning in no, which we find in earlier examples indicating the shift from event narration to comment, summary, and argument, respectively, is exploited here for a different kind of contrast. In segment b., the speaker is introducing a protagonist’s reply to another participant in the original event sequence. Here too, no has a resumptive role. It anchors the following content in the established context of the preceding utterance, and indeed highlights the new content as a consequence of the preceding event. As a demarcation signal no signals a shift in the roles of the participants in the story, or a topic shift.

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⁶ During this period, Romani was seldom written down. However, the speaker is using his notes in German to deliver his speech in Romani.
3.2 Exploratory functions

Examples (5)-(9) show instances of _no_ that serve connectivity functions, that is, they support speaker-continuation in expediting actions of narration and argumentation. The following four examples show a somewhat different role that is assigned to Romani _no_. This role is exploratory, in that it relates almost entirely to the effort that the speaker put into developing, monitoring and maintaining a productive interactional relationship with the listener and does not directly support the chaining of propositions and the speaker’s own continuation of the utterance sequence. The term ‘exploratory’ seems appropriate to capture the role of _no_ in reaching out to the listener, exclusively, without simultaneously serving as a connectivity device.

In example (10), the speaker is describing the living conditions of Roms who residing in huts in Paris, and goes on to compare them with the lifestyle of her own community during her childhood in Sweden. She tries to help the listener picture the conditions by comparing them to the dwellings of a mutual acquaintance, who she merely hints at, and whose name is then delivered by the listener:

(10)

a. S: E Rom bešenas ande kesave barakuri, ando foro, ando Paris, maškaral, pe/ kesave proncuri von kerenas peske barakuri, žanes, korkoro anda phala, sar kerel o kako, amaro *Freund* inke so ..

b. T: Aha, o Azem.

c. S: **No?**

d. T: Hmm.

e. S: Thol pa *Dach, und so, na?*

f. T: Hmm.

g. S: Aj kade te avel ame atunči ando švedo.

a. S: The Roms lived in these kinds of huts, in the city, in Paris, in the middle, in/ such boards they built huts for themselves, you know, on their own from planks, like this one does, our friend what’s..

b. T: Aha, Azem.

c. S: **NO?**

b. T: Hmm.

d. S: He puts it on the *roof, and all that, right?*

e. T: Hmm.

g. S: And that’s what we used to do in Sweden, too.
In segment c. the speaker S uses *no* as a stand-alone utterance with rising intonation to reassure the listener that the information that he had provided in the preceding utterance is correct and matches the intentions of the speaker herself, as conveyed by the hint delivered in segment a. While the marker expresses affirmation of the preceding content, the interrogative prosody invites the listener to review that content in conjunction with the information provided by the speaker in segment a. and thereby to reassure the listener that the intended comparison is indeed valid: the dwellings of the Roms in Paris were indeed comparable to that of Azem, and the listener can be reassured that by naming Azem he has correctly captured and understood the speaker’s intention and obtained an accurate idea of the past circumstances in Paris. This invitation to the listener is construed through the rising pitch, which mimics one of the principal structural features of interrogative illocution in Romani.

Both examples (11) and (12) show *no* in a different role, as a tag augmenting the utterance. In (11) the speaker W, of the older generation, tells the extraordinary story of a family relative who was born in prison. She introduces the odd fact in segment a., then proceeds to provide the background circumstances through an explanation in b., and finally reiterates the fact in the form of a conclusion, in c. The tag *no* accompanies this conclusion:

(11)

a. W: Aj vov kothe ande temnica arakhadžilo.

b. Ke phari sas e Lilenoa, arakh/ xutinde la le štofojsa taj o/ xoxadas la gažja taj phandade la e romni phari.

c. Taj arakhadžilas o Danuš ande temnica, *no*.

a. W: And he was born there in prison.

b. Because Lilenoa was pregnant, they found/ they caught her with fabrics and the/ she had cheated a non-Gypsy woman and they arrested her and the girl was pregnant.

c. And so Danuš was born in prison, **NO**.

In (12) the speaker P is describing her family’s door-to-door sales routines, which they practice in the countryside during weekends. Their base during these work trips is a hotel. It is introduced in the previous context, and receives attention again in segment a., followed immediately by a brief description in b. The tag *no* in b. signals that the hotel has now been described and that its description has been concluded, and the speaker is then ready to move on to describe other aspects of the work and travel routine:
In both cases, *no* reaffirms the truth value of a key fact that is of interest and worthy of emphasis and explication. At the same time it signals the conclusion of the delivery of information regarding that fact, and thereby implicitly the assumption that the speaker can now rely on the listener to have absorbed and accepted the explication.

The next examples offer insights into yet a further function and use of *no*. Here it appears in a dialogue where turns frequently alternate. The speaker M is asking his mother, W, about their family history. He reacts to her answers with immediate, brief follow-up questions on details:

(12)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>P:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Kodo si hotelo aj / šukar hotelo, <strong>no</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>A[j kodo keras aba de šov šon, <strong>Freitag, Samstag, Sonntag</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>P:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>It’s a hotel and/ a nice hotel. <strong>NO</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And we’ve been doing this for six month, on <strong>Friday, Saturday, Sunday</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next examples offer insights into yet a further function and use of *no*. Here it appears in a dialogue where turns frequently alternate. The speaker M is asking his mother, W, about their family history. He reacts to her answers with immediate, brief follow-up questions on details:

(13)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>M:</td>
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<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>W:</td>
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<td>c.</td>
<td>M:</td>
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<tr>
<td>d.</td>
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<td>e.</td>
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<td>g.</td>
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<td>h.</td>
<td>W:</td>
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<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>M:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j.</td>
<td>W:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a. M: What was it called there, where this was, which town?
b. W: Where my father went for my mother – Topolča, the town, but his village was called Prazno.
c. M: Was it there or in …
d. W: In Prazno.
e. M: NO and who was her father?
f. W: Whose?
g. M: your mother/ your mother’s.
h. W: Janko, and his/ her mother was called Magda, NO.
i. M: NO and what did he do there?
j. W: He was the/ the/ the/ her father/ her/ her father, my mother’s [father] was a blacksmith, do you know what that is?

W’s use of no as a tag in segment h. is similar to that found in examples (11) and (12), indicating the speaker’s conclusion of a descriptive unit of talk and the affirmation of that unit’s truth value. But in segments e. and i., no appears at the beginning of M’s turn, in utterance-initial position, marking out a prompt to the listener W to provide specifications and details as a follow-up to the particular items of information that she had already provided. More specifically, both requests for information relate to prominent topic-actors that had been introduced by W in her narrative. This seems to be highly relevant: no resumes a comment on an aforementioned topical entity (W’s mother in segment e., and Janko in segment h.). It thus contributes, as we saw in some of the earlier examples, to setting a demarcation line between units of information and shifting the focus to a new topic. In these instances, the shift of focus sets in motion an interrogative procedure that prompts the listener to provide supplementary information on one of the established topical entities.

Finally, a different kind of listener-prompt is found in example (14). This excerpt continues the conversation between the son M and his mother W about their family history:

(14)
a. M: Kaj našle?
b. W: Šun, avilas o marimo.
c. M: No.
d. W: Taj kana sas o ma/ bešlas panž berš.
a. M: Where did they escape to?

b. W: Listen, the war had started.

c. M: NO.

d. W: And during the wa/ he was imprisoned for five years.

In segment c., M prompts his interlocutor W to continue her narrative by signalling his comprehension of her introductory statement in b. Here, no appears as a stand-alone utterance. But unlike its counterpart stand-alone no in example (10), it is characterised by a falling intonation. Rather than reassure the listener of the truth value of a comparison or conclusion, as in (10), it grants the listener the floor and gives her the go-ahead to proceed with the narration in the next turn. At the same time it gently urges the speaker to complete the point she had started to make – or to complete the knowledge category that has been initiated. In this way, no activates a kind of mental time axis in the here and now, through which speaker and listener can support one another in recapitulating previous content and drawing on such content as a point of departure for further expansion of the narration.

4. Excursion: A comparison with other languages

The contact situation that is typical of both Yiddish and Romani must figure prominently in any attempt to propose an historical account of the position of nu/no in these languages. For this reason, a comparison of the markers with their counterparts in contact languages or languages that share a similar history of contacts seems worthwhile. We are unable, however, to undertake a comprehensive survey of related markers within the scope of this paper. Instead, we will briefly cite two sources that document related uses. For Polish, a recent and current contact language that is part of the multilingual repertoire of the speakers of the Kelderash/Lovari variety of Romani discussed here, Kryk (1992) provides a brief overview of some uses of no, identical in form to the Romani marker. Note that a similar form can be found in central-eastern German dialects such as Saxon, as well as in Czech and Slovak. Example (15), reproduced from Kryk (1992), shows Polish no in utterance-initial position conveying a function that is quite similar to the listener-prompt found in the Romani example (13) segment i. Kryk characterises this use of no as a “gap-filler” and a signal of “hesitation, gathering one’s thoughts”: 
A further function, described by Kryk as “speaker’s impatience”, is also turn-initial and embedded into a listener-prompt, here carrying an interrogative illocution and apparently lacking separation through a pause from the remainder of the utterance:

(16)
A: **No** co ty, spisz?
B: No.
A: Come on, are you asleep?

A final use of *no*, labelled by Kryk (1992) as “confirmation”, shows the marker as a stand-alone utterance, apparently in a function that is quite similar to the one attested in the Romani example (10) segment c.:

(17)
A: Ona jest kochana, nie?
B: No.
A: She is lovely, isn’t she?
B: Yes, sure.

Though not an exhaustive survey, these isolated examples suggest a close affinity, both in structural distribution and in conversational function, between Romani *no* and its Polish counterpart and support the hypothesis of fusion of procedures within speakers’ Polish-Romani multilingual repertoire, and thus the contact-susceptibility of the marker.

Our next comparison language is the Franconian German dialect known as ‘Volga-German’, as spoken by the descendants of ethnic Germans who were deported from the Volga region to Kazakhstan during the Second World War. The data come from Anders (1993) and show the frequent use of Russian-derived *nu* in transcriptions of audio recordings of natural speech. Example (18) shows *nu* as utterance-initial connector, introducing a new turn yet pat of a tightly integrated chain of utterances in speaker A’s narration:
a. A: The man was ill and so we couldn't.

b. B: Yes.

c. A: **NU** and ... when he died, and then ... it didn’t take very long.

The connector-function in segment c. resembles the use of *nu* in the Yiddish example (4), where it is an utterance-initial marker of speaker continuation signalling a consequential relation between the content of two adjoining utterances.

In (19), *nu* acts as the speaker’s self-prompt to continue the utterance. Accompanied by an annotated physical gesture indicating the speaker’s apparent impatience at not being able to retrieve the appropriate expressions, it resembles the search for a missing word, verbalised in Yiddish through *nu* in example (1):

(19)
A: Die hat das alles/\[pounds on table\] *nu* ... die war/ die hat das alles gewißt!
A: She/all that/\[pounds on table\] **NU**... she was/ she knew it all!

Finally, *nu* in (20) bears similarities with the Yiddish speaker-continuation marker of dismissal in example (2). In both cases, the speakers announce the continuation of a turn, overcoming and setting aside a complication that has arisen in reconstructing relevant events:

(20)
A: Und die hat doch lauter/die Katarina hat lauter so *specialisty*, die wo baue hän kenne, die wo des alles hän kenne mache
Und so weiter und weiter und/wie wir dort sin niberkomme, alle.

*Potom • nu*, die Wolgarepublik, *potom nu*, so is weiter und weiter, die ganze istorija.
A: And she had all those/Katarina had all those specialists, who were able to build, those who were able to do everything

And so on and on and/ when we all came there

*Then* **NU**, the Volga Republic, *then* **NU** it went on and on, the whole *story*.

5. **Discussion: Toward a typology of nu/no**

The comparison in the previous section allowed us to establish an affinity between Romani and Polish *no*, and between Yiddish and Volga German *nu*. In the contact history of the respective markers, it appears that the variety of Romani considered here has adopted *no* either directly from Polish, or possibly as a feature of a larger central European linguistic area. Both Yiddish and Volga German seem to have borrowed *nu* from Russian, though the precise circumstances of its diffusion into varieties of Yiddish spoken in Poland are not yet established. At any rate, we seem to be able to pinpoint two geographical zones of distribution of these two counterpart expressions: In a western zone, *no* prevails and stands out through its distinctive use for affirmation purposes as a stand-alone utterance, as well as its use as listener-prompt, usually in utterance-initial position. In the eastern zone, *nu* is found and has the distinctive role of indicating speaker self-prompt as well as dismissal. The two have one prominent role in common, namely the resumptive speaker continuation function, and at a more abstract level they can both serve as prompts, albeit targeting different participants and for different content functions. Table 1 provides an overview of the functions established for the markers *nu* in Yiddish and *no* in Romani:
Table 1: Overview of functions for Yiddish *nu* and Romani *no*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example no</th>
<th>Action structure</th>
<th>Action goal</th>
<th>Prosodic structure</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>Speaker self-prompt</td>
<td>Word retrieval</td>
<td>Pause, high pitch</td>
<td>Utterance internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c</td>
<td>Speaker exclamatory self-prompt</td>
<td>Word retrieval</td>
<td>high pitch</td>
<td>Utterance final</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2e</td>
<td>Speaker continuation</td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>Sort pause</td>
<td>Utterance initial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3e</td>
<td>Speaker assertion</td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>Falling pitch</td>
<td>Stand-alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b</td>
<td>Speaker continuation</td>
<td>Consequential</td>
<td>Pause, high pitch</td>
<td>Utterance initial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5g</td>
<td>Speaker continuation</td>
<td>Evaluation-summary</td>
<td>Short pause</td>
<td>Utterance initial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6d</td>
<td>Speaker continuation</td>
<td>Evaluation-summary</td>
<td>Short pause</td>
<td>Utterance initial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7b</td>
<td>Speaker continuation</td>
<td>Inference-based conclusion</td>
<td>No pause</td>
<td>Utterance initial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7c</td>
<td>Speaker continuation</td>
<td>Inference-based justification</td>
<td>No pause</td>
<td>Utterance initial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8d</td>
<td>Speaker continuation</td>
<td>Contrast-based argumentation</td>
<td>No pause</td>
<td>Utterance initial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9b</td>
<td>Speaker continuation</td>
<td>Consequential, topic-shift</td>
<td>No pause</td>
<td>Utterance initial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10c</td>
<td>Listener reassurance</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Rising</td>
<td>Stand-alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11a</td>
<td>Speaker conclusion</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Falling</td>
<td>Utterance final</td>
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<tr>
<td>12b</td>
<td>Speaker conclusion</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Falling</td>
<td>Utterance final</td>
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<tr>
<td>13e</td>
<td>Listener prompt</td>
<td>Supplementation</td>
<td>No pause</td>
<td>Utterance initial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13i</td>
<td>Listener prompt</td>
<td>Supplementation</td>
<td>No pause</td>
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<tr>
<td>14c</td>
<td>Listener prompt</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>Falling</td>
<td>Stand-alone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We distinguish several dimensions: The action role pertains to the function of the marker in identifying the activity role of a participant in the interaction. The relevant categories are prompt (to carry out an action), continuation (of an action chain that has already been initiated), reassurance (providing feedback on the action of the interlocutor) and conclusion (bringing an action to a close). The prosodic dimension is often used to integrate illocutionary features into the structure of the marker. High pitch correlates with the command-mimicry of speaker self-prompt. Rising pitch correlates with the imitation of interrogative illocution when reassuring the listener (simulating a request for feedback that the reassurance has been successful). Pauses that immediately follow the marker often correlate with the boundaries of content units such as search procedures and summaries, the absence of a pause correlates with speaker continuation for argumentative purposes, justification, conclusion and so on. A falling pitch may accompany affirmation or dismissal. At the content level, we refer not to the propositional content itself but rather to the role of the relevant content unit in the speaker’s build-up of the discourse and creation and elaboration of meaningful relations between
propositional units. Finally, we add a structural dimension, which makes reference to the position of
the marker in the utterance structure.

The overview allows us to cautiously identify an invariable or core meaning of the markers,
one that tends to cut across the usage categories and functions in the two languages under
consideration. We might define *nu/no* as a retrieval procedure of knowledge that is accessible in
principle, for the purpose of establishing a shared perspective for continuation of information
delivery. Admittedly, this core characterisation remains rather vague. But it entails recognition of at
least two sub-components of semantic-pragmatic meaning: The first is the backwards-directed
focusing procedure of shared information. All instances of *nu/no* share some kind of procedure for
establishing common ground as a point of departure for the next move. The second is a forwards-
directed venture, which constructs a contrastive boundary between material that has been introduced,
and a goal that is to be achieved. The marker *nu/no* is thus a kind of recapitulating demarcation
boundary.

Seemingly in contradiction to this characterisation is the use of *nu* in Yiddish as a self-
prompt for word retrieval. Yet this function exploits precisely the generic meaning of *nu* as a productive
retrieval procedure for shared knowledge: It is deployed in an effort to put a shared realm of
knowledge in the spotlight in the hope of identifying the missing expression in order to move
forward. The many examples of *nu/no* as a marker of continuity and connectivity stand in no
contradiction at all to the demarcating and contrastive function of the marker, since where *nu/no* is
involved continuity is invariably linked to a move to a new task, often of a qualifying nature of some
kind (assessment, comment, justification, etc).

We might speculate that the marker’s complex synchronic composition has its roots in the
forms’ etymology. If an underlying Germanic element *nu-* is at its core, quite possibly as an early
loan into Slavic, then the origin of the retrieval and recapitulation procedure might be in a temporal
deixis representing the here-and-now (cf. German *nun*), indicating shared information that is of
immediate relevance. Through an anaphoric meaning extension this temporal expression may have
come to refer to discourse knowledge while still maintaining the residual function of a proximate time
deixis, thus (re-)establishing the relevance of discourse-contextual knowledge for the immediate here-
and-now. This, in effect grammaticalised deixis, will have become exploited in various turn and
illocutionary positions. It is used to re-focus verbalised content as well as a placeholder for non-
verbalised (but relevant) content; and through its location within the utterance – in initial or final
position – or indeed in the discourse sequence as a stand-alone utterance it acquires a range of
connectivity functions, steering the listener backwards as well as forwards in the discourse. In
conjunction with a range of illocutionary modifications it can act as a prompt toward the listener, as a
speaker’s self-prompt, and as a sign of confirmation and reassurance. It can signal both agreement and dismissal of contextual material.

If we follow this scenario, then it seems that the underlying deictic meaning of *nu/no* gave rise to an anaphoric use, which was exploited for sequentiality, serving as a marker primarily of speaker continuation on the basis of a re-affirmed shared perspective. It then acquired the meaning of an emotive reinforcement, characterised by a change in illocutionary force accompanied by structural modifications in the position of the marker within the utterance/turn as well as its prosody. This led to the emergence of the marker’s role as a prompt. This scenario stands in contrast to Maschler’s interpretation of the continuier *nu* in Israeli Hebrew *nu* as a grammaticalised gesture of impatience, which suggests that the cross-participant urging or hastening function came first. Maschler rightly describes the culture of Israeli face to face communication as one that allows overt intervention and is characterised by an absence, by and large, of politeness. This is certainly well in line with our own impressions of the culture of talk in Israeli Hebrew. Nonetheless, we propose that this culture of overt, potentially impatient and confrontational talk – for which Katriel (1986) coins the term ‘dugri speech’ – is a specific development of local Israeli – in Katriel’s (and others’) terms ‘Sabra’ – culture, at least in its extreme manifestations. Maschler’s (2009: 45) data show a mere 5.2% of occurrences of *nu* in its function as an overt marker that hastens non-verbal action, suggesting that this function is derived, rather than primary or original, while the great majority of independent Hebrew *nu* tokens (68.7%) serve according to Maschler the function of urging further development within the topic of the discourse. Neither function is found in our corpora of Yiddish and Romani. Instead, the only overt prompt or urging function attested for Yiddish *nu* is a speaker self-prompt (in connection with retrieval difficulties of a word). A similar function is attested for *nu*, also a loan from Russian, in Volga German. In Romani, *no* as a listener-prompt remains tightly integrated into the utterance and appears in initial position with no pause, while its stand-alone occurrence is a supporting gesture indicating comprehension and agreement, rather than an action that emphatically urges the listener to proceed. It therefore seems that the roots of the functions of *nu/no* are in a cooperative rather than antagonistic or interventionist map of speaker-hearer interaction. Yet from the use of the marker as a prompt we can very well understand how a specific cultural setting may have given rise to the functions attested for *nu* in Israeli Hebrew.
References


Schegloff, Emanuel. 2007. Sequence organization in interaction. Cambridge: CUP.

