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# Defining Graduate Academic Yiddish Proficiency: Results of an Evidence-Based Study

JESSICA ANNE KIRZANE

*University of Chicago*

*E-mail: [jkirzane@uchicago.edu](mailto:jkirzane@uchicago.edu)*

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In the field of second language pedagogy, it has become increasingly common to consider the real-world usage for language when strategizing goals and curriculum development for language instruction. Emerging from a reverse design perspective, which prioritizes desired outcomes as a starting place for curricular design, language instructors identify and define the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) they aim for their students to acquire. In cases in which existing proficiency guidelines are not well aligned with the real-world language use that a particular course is targeting, it is becoming increasingly common for instructors to design Languages for Special Purposes (LSP) courses that reflect the unique uses certain bodies of students may have for the language. This paper considers one such case, that of Yiddish for Academic Purposes. Using domain analysis, a multidimensional research framework that supports and undergirds the development of new LSP courses in an assessment-driven proficiency-oriented reverse design framework and evidence-centered design (ECD), this study presents a series of target KSAs for Yiddish for Academic Purposes, on the basis of which curriculum developers could build assessments and subsequently curricula aligned with one another and with the specific language usage unique to the real-world language use domain of graduate academic Yiddish. This process of domain analysis could be replicated for other languages when academic usage is considered as a specific purpose for which an LSP course could be developed. This study is particularly relevant to the development of LSP courses for less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), which tend to be under-resourced and under-researched. Examining academic applications of LCTLs is particularly essential for those languages for which there are fewer, or more constrained, other “real world” applications for the language outside of academic use than there are for more commonly spoken languages.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the field of second language pedagogy, it has become increasingly common to consider the real-world usage for language when strategizing goals and curriculum development for language instruction. Emerging from a reverse design perspective, which prioritizes desired outcomes as a starting place for curricular design, language instructors identify and define the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) they aim for their students to acquire, and the specific purposes for language use have become a pivotal deciding factor in this determination. Rather than adhering to curricula for general language learning, they ask whether such language-use goals are the most appropriate, sufficient and effective in terms of the specific learning outcomes of their students. It is therefore crucial that “specific purpose courses have to be specifically developed for local needs and the unique features of each context” (Lear, 2021, p. 140). In many contexts, the target goals determined by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), which form the basis for most first- and second-year language courses at the university level in the United States, may not be fully aligned to the specific purposes for which students are learning a language. In these cases, it is becoming increasingly common for instructors to design Languages for Special Purposes (LSP) courses that reflect the unique uses certain bodies of students may have for the language, prioritizing students’

needs and goals rather than an abstract or overly general target of “fluency.” This paper considers one such case, that of Yiddish for Academic Purposes.

Central to the project of reverse designing a curriculum that would have a well-defined outcome of producing Yiddish speakers who are functional in a graduate-level academic environment is defining what it means to function in such an environment. This study offers empirically collected evidence to analyze the target domain of language use – that of Yiddish for Academic Purposes – and posits that this is a necessary basis for proceeding in the development of LSP courses targeting that domain. Using domain analysis, a multidimensional research framework that supports and undergirds the development of new LSP courses in an assessment-driven proficiency-oriented reverse design framework and evidence-centered design (ECD) (Baumann et al., 2024), this study presents a series of target KSAs for Yiddish for Academic Purposes, on the basis of which curriculum developers could build assessments and subsequently curricula aligned with one another and with the specific language usage unique to the real-world language use domain of graduate academic Yiddish (Dursun, 2023; Baumann et al., 2024; for more on evidence-centered design see Mislevy, 2011; Haertel & Mislevy, 2006; on reverse design framework see McTighe & Wiggins, 2008; for an example of a similar domain analysis project, see Shelton, 2023). Such a process could be replicated for other languages and in other domains, and the findings of this process, while specific to Yiddish for Academic Purposes, have ramifications for understanding and teaching toward academic language usage beyond Yiddish. This study is particularly relevant to the development of LSP courses for LCTLs, which tend to be under-resourced and under-researched. Examining academic applications of LCTLs is particularly essential for those languages for which there are fewer, or more constrained, other “real world” applications for the language outside of academic use than there are for more commonly spoken languages.

## **The Domain Analysis Framework**

As Bachman and Palmer have argued, language assessments should be designed for a “situation or context in which the test taker will be using the language outside of the test itself” (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 18). That is to say, the assessment, and the instruction leading up to the assessment, should have immediate application and meaning outside of the instructional setting; it should be usable by the language student in the real world. Domain analysis is a systematic analysis of the language use of a particular domain in order to identify, and then define, the KSAs as well as corresponding assessment tasks for a specific application of a target language in the real world. Because it starts with the evidence-based determination of what students should be learning in the first place, in order to function within a given domain, “Domain analysis research is vital to provide a solid argument for the validation of this reverse design process as it helps define the destination before one sets off on a journey and ensures informed and deliberate decisions are made as a result” (Dursun, 2023, p. 3). It takes as foundational the demographics of students and those they want to communicate with and the situations or contexts in which the student aims to be using the language in the real world.

Domain analysis shifts the attention, in an analytical way, onto the domain itself and the ways language is used within it. Conducting a domain analysis requires following specific protocols to ensure that the research is not simply a conventional needs analysis focusing on the perceived needs of students and instructors. After all, students’ perceptions of their needs in a foreign language classroom often differ from their instructors’ understanding and beliefs

about effective teaching (Brown, 2009). While it is indeed important to study students' own learning goals in order to make the programs "more attractive and appealing to existing and prospective students," appealing to the specific linguistic areas that align with their interests, orientations, and aspirations, it is my contention that students are not the (only) experts in what they will actually need to learn in order to thrive for a particular language use domain, and should be one of several stakeholders studied to generate learning goals (Nedashkivska & Sivachenko, 2017, p. 67; For examples of needs analysis studies centering students' perspectives see Golfetto, 2020; Nedashkivska & Sivachenko, 2017; Rifkin, 2012). Likewise, studies relying largely on instructors' perspectives in order to create a "syllabus that corresponds to the needs and goals of a population of students" are missing key stakeholders that would make the data more reliable (Ihde, 2000, p. 1).

Investigating the domain through seeking out multiple perspectives from a variety of stakeholders yields a more reliable picture of the domain of language use. It allows for discovery, without predefined hypotheses or assumptions, that begins with a research question and methodically seeks out answers about what learners should be doing with the language in the real world, and what demonstrable, ideally measurable, actions or behaviors they perform to demonstrate their abilities. Taking a proficiency-oriented perspective, in which the primary concern is what students *can do* with the language, rather than what they know *about* the language, such a design requires specific targets for how a student can perform in various tasks necessary in an academic environment (Tedick, 2002). Determining what these proficiencies should be, and identifying the KSAs required to function in the domain, is the first step of curricular design in a reverse-design framework. Once these KSAs are identified, tests can be designed and developed to measure student progress toward these targets. Curricular materials can then be developed to guide students toward these target outcomes. Instructors can teach toward, and then measure, students' ability to use the language in the real-world applications that have been determined through the domain analysis research. This allows not only for the evaluation of individual students' success toward these goals, but also for the process of evaluating courses, programs, and curricular material, so that the state of language instruction itself can be rigorously assessed and improved upon (See Baumann et al., 2024; Dursun, 2023).

In the case of the domain of Yiddish for academic purposes at the graduate level in English-speaking environments, the target functional outcomes necessary to successfully deploy the reverse design model have not heretofore been empirically known. Determining these functional outcomes through evidence-based research is necessary for LSP courses such as Yiddish for Academic Purposes. It is often the case that "LSP courses and programs have been developed *as if* instructors know the targeted performance outcomes and proficiency levels despite the lack of a rigorous empirical foundation informing course design" (Lear, 2021, p. 142). Proficiency, in this case, refers to an emphasis on the real-world contexts in which the language is used as a tool for promoting the exchange of meaningful communication and conveying information. Examining the way the language is used in the domain itself allows the researcher to base their goals for courses and curricula around what constitutes proficiency for students using the language in their target domain.

Students studying Yiddish at the advanced level often aspire to work with Yiddish in graduate school for humanities research, yet there has never been a thorough study of exactly how Yiddish is used in the programs to which they aspire, making it quite difficult to appropriately train students to succeed in this domain. Students may enter graduate programs that assume and expect them to have language skills specific to the academic domain of Yiddish study, and they may have acquired Yiddish language skills in their undergraduate training through general curricula not tailored to these specific needs. Without attention to the

specific real-world language use of Yiddish for academic purposes, language instruction for Yiddish may be setting such students up for difficulties in their graduate work. A thorough analysis of the domain of academic Yiddish in higher education in English speaking environments allows the researcher to describe the particular language skills and uses necessary to function effectively and ultimately to thrive with Yiddish in these particular spaces. This, in turn, allows instructors to define and develop goals for what students in Yiddish courses should achieve and to describe what proficiency looks like in the academic Yiddish environment based on evidence from this research. Bolstered by these goals, instructors will be able to design assessments that evaluate students' mastery of the proficiency skills required in for academic Yiddish, and then design and implement a curriculum geared toward helping students achieve these skills (For a discussion of proficiency-based instruction and its implementation and evaluation, see Liskin-Gasparro, 2003; Malone & Sandroock, 2016; Neubauer et al, 2019).

It may at first blush seem that language courses for “academic purposes” should be thought of differently than language courses for “specific purposes” - that the register and style of language that is unique to academic writing distinguishes it from, for instance, practitioner workplace writing, and the other “real-world” usages that LSP courses target. But the academy is indeed a “real world” in which language is used. Recent LSP handbooks focusing on English have folded “academic purposes” into the umbrella of “specific purposes,” alongside other “authentic uses” for language, such as the language used in travel, or for law, business, or medical professions (see, for instance, Paltridge & Starfield, 2012; Woodrow, 2018). This study likewise takes academic usage *as* a specific domain with its own norms for workplace usage and argues that attention to the nature of this domain – not only for English (where it has been more widely theorized) but for all languages, including Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) – is necessary for preparing students who wish to use the language in the “real world” of academia. (For writing about English for Academic Purposes, see Basturkmen & Wette, 2016; Charles, 2012; Charles & Pecorari, 2015; de Chazal, 2014; Hyland, 2014; Hyland & Shaw, 2016; Wette, 2018). That academic use is a specific “real world” use of the language is particularly true for Yiddish – and likely for other stateless minority languages – in which there are fewer other “real world” applications for the language outside of academic use than there are for more commonly spoken languages.

Many LCTLs face challenges such as low enrollment, shortages of high-quality pedagogical resources, as well as a lack of related research. Instructors may be the only individuals on their campus teaching the language, and they may struggle to meet the needs of various undergraduate and graduate students, heritage and traditional learners (Baumann et al., 2024; Giupponi et al., 2024). The challenges of establishing proficiency outcomes for new courses in under-resourced, under-researched LCTLs therefore abound, particularly as LCTL instructors tend to lack the assessment training necessary to develop and assess such outcomes (Dursun et al., 2022). The concerns of this study, while specific to Yiddish and its academic usage, are likely applicable to academic usage of a variety of languages in which a philological approach is common in academic settings, including though not limited to LCTLs. Taking Yiddish as a case study argues for the relevance of this LCTL, and all LCTLs, to the broader language pedagogy community, and urges not only a platform for underrepresented languages in their particularities but also the way that sharing knowledge gleaned from such languages can benefit the broader language pedagogy field.

## Defining the Domain

Yiddish is a Germanic language that developed within a European, Ashkenazi diasporic Jewish civilization as its speakers settled and migrated through Germany and across Eastern Europe. It has been the spoken language of a significant portion of the Jewish people for the past thousand years. Written in the Hebrew alphabet, Yiddish is a fusion language that integrated Middle High German with elements of Hebrew and Aramaic, Romance languages, and components of Slavic and other co-territorial languages where Yiddish speakers settled (For an overview of the Yiddish language and its history see Shandler, 2020).

Historically, Yiddish was connected to no nation-state or army, and was the vernacular language of a large minority population largely centered in Eastern Europe. The number of Yiddish speakers declined sharply over the twentieth century for a variety of factors, some of them catastrophic. Already in the early twentieth-century “glotophagy,” the trend of adoption of major languages over minor ones, was underway as upwardly mobile Jews strove to become more culturally integrated into neighboring more affluent populations and adopted neighboring languages such as Polish and English (Cohen, 2002, p.172). In 1939, an estimated eleven to thirteen million people spoke Yiddish, representing 75 percent of the world’s Jews, and they used the language for everyday communication as well as for a wide range of cultural activities (Katz, 2011; YIVO, 2014). This total was dramatically, violently diminished as a result of the Nazi genocide: half of the world’s Yiddish speakers were killed during this period and the language’s cultural centers in Eastern Europe were decimated.

After the Holocaust, Yiddish was still the language with the largest number of speakers among the Jews of the world. However, due to forced acculturation and assimilation in the Soviet Union, repression of Yiddish to foreground the use of Hebrew in the State of Israel, and acculturation and assimilation to dominant language and culture in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere, the number of secular Yiddish speakers has dwindled. Today, there are only a few thousand fluent speakers of “secular” Yiddish worldwide. In this case, secular does not refer to the absence of engagement with, or rejection of, religious texts or traditions, but to the language of Yiddish speakers who participated in a cultural life that deliberately and actively engaged with modern literature, theater, politics, and education (for statistics on contemporary secular Yiddish speakers, see Katz, 2009). Speakers of “secular” Yiddish may view the language itself as holy (Fishman, 2002) and may themselves have varying degrees of religious observance and background.

Among Haredim, traditionalist Jews who maintain strict adherence to Jewish religious law and who live in segregated communities, Yiddish is a widely spoken and growing language. Hasidim, the largest community of today’s Yiddish speakers, emerged from a mystical revival movement founded in eighteenth century Poland, a diffuse movement structured around charismatic leaders, called *rebbe*s, each with their own followers maintaining their own institutions and customs. After their population was decimated by the Holocaust, these communities came to form an interconnected network of enclaves in the United States, Canada, Israel, Europe, and Australia, with Yiddish as a vernacular language connecting Hasidic communities and separating them from the mainstream, non-Yiddish-speaking societies in which they live. This Yiddish-speaking population is expanding due to high birth rates and low attrition, with an estimated 1 million Haredi Yiddish speakers worldwide (this figure comes from Katz, 2009). Contemporary Hasidic Yiddish is a living, growing, and rapidly developing dialect of Yiddish (for more about contemporary Hasidic Yiddish see Assouline, 2018; Fader, 2006).

In academic settings, particularly in the study of history and literature, in higher education in English speaking environments, such as universities in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia, the focus tends to be on historical Yiddish dialects or on “secular” Yiddish dialects, rather than on contemporary Hasidic variants. The concept of secular Yiddish dates to the beginnings of European Jewish modernity, as speakers and writers employed Yiddish to produce a corpus of modern literature and to engage in the modern European marketplace of ideas: philosophical, political, and aesthetic. Writing from the cultural life of secular Yiddish, such as its periodical press, literature, theater, music, and education, often forms the corpus that is the object of study in academic Yiddish circles (for a succinct description of the history and status of secular Yiddish see Margolis, 2023). As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has noted, “It is now commonplace that as the number of native speakers of Yiddish declines, with the exception of the ultra-Orthodox, academic interest in Yiddish increases” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2012, p. ix). This academic Yiddish tends to focus on historical, literary, and cultural materials related to secular Yiddish’s past. As Avineri notes, this Yiddish is often presented as “endangered” although growing numbers of Yiddish speakers in some Hasidic communities attest to the fact that Yiddish is not, in itself, endangered – its growth among Hasidic speakers contrasts with the small numbers of speakers of “secular” variants of the language (Avineri, 2014).

Many of those who study Yiddish in academic settings also identify themselves with “Yiddishism,” a concept that arose at the turn of the twentieth century to promote the Yiddish language over and against linguistic assimilation (Margolis, 2023, p. 37). Indeed, Avineri has argued that “secular engagement with Yiddish in the United States is by and large characterized by an ardent orientation to the language rather than competence in it” and constitute a “metalinguistic community” of actors engaged more with discourse *about* the language than with the language itself (Avineri, 2012; see also Friedman, 2020; Shandler, 2008; for more on Yiddish learners’ motivation as differentiated across religious, cultural, regional, age, and gender identities, see Avineri, 2015). As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains, the study of Yiddish is “never neutral... because languages are by their very nature highly charged phenomena” and because Yiddish, in particular, is charged by its role “as a proxy for its absent speakers” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2012, p. x). Avineri likewise proposes that those engaged with Yiddish are “socialized into a diasporic language identity focused on a language’s complexity as a symbol for its speakers’ mobile history” (Avineri, 2012, p.9).

This sense of activism contributes to the formation of what researchers studying the flourishing of Gaelic language in music and dance, if not in fluent conversation, on Cape Breton Island in Canada have called the “rooted L2 self:” a feeling of connection with other speakers of the language, with “heritage passions”: emotional bonds with the language itself (Baker et al., 2017, p. 512). It also speaks to the broader question of students’ motivations for learning languages other than English more broadly, given the global status, ubiquity, and cachet of English as an international language: motivations that often have less to do with practicality than “symbolic and other forms of capital” such as connection with a faith or heritage community, a degree of novelty, perceived difficulty, exoticness, and a sense of purpose or mission (Duff, 2017, p. 598; Nedashkivska & Sivachenko, 2017). Broadly speaking, research has shown that “humanistic reasons may be more important for students of LCTLs than utilitarian ones,” and this may be all the more the case in the sphere of endangered languages (Back, et al, 2009, p. 44). In particular, speakers involved in language revitalization efforts tend to coalesce around shared “beliefs and feelings” about the language and the “imagined pasts, presents, and futures in which [members of the speech community] locate themselves” – in the case of Yiddish, as Avineri demonstrates, an affective connection to the

language among speakers of secular Yiddish often includes a desire to build bridges with historical Yiddish speaking communities in Europe prior to World War II, even while constructing boundaries that exclude elements of contemporary Hasidic Yiddish that do not meet with the speech community's linguistic purism oriented toward the language's past (Avineri, 2014, p. 30; Avineri & Kroskirty, 2014, pp. 2-3; see also Kroskirty, 2010). Because such "beliefs and feelings" are significant for instructors as well as students, they may be operationalized in the Yiddish classroom so that beyond reading texts in Yiddish to analyze them in English, students may also be called upon to participate in spaces in which speaking the language is a form of activism against the cultural hegemony of English and toward the continuation and reinvigoration of the language and its perpetuation. Avineri argues that this sense of activism may at times be, paradoxically, more valued than language functionality itself (2012).

As is the case with many LCTLs and minority languages, even at the elementary level the domain of real-world language use for Yiddish is already "specific" insofar as the real-world applications of the language are constrained by the real-world circumstances of the language itself. Particularly in the case of minority and stateless languages, the recommended KSAs for general language classes may never, or rarely, match the typical "real world" use of the language, even outside the bounds of a targeted "specific" domain. Whereas the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines suggest that a speaker at the intermediate level should be able to handle "straightforward survival situations (getting a room at a hotel, ordering food, arranging travel, etc)," such situations may be rare in certain minority language contexts in which English or another majority, and in some cases colonial, language predominates in the public sphere (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012). Nevertheless, as Peckarer notes in his reflections on teaching Yiddish as a vernacular language, Yiddish is "nonetheless taught with the aim of achieving communicative competence" in those specific real-world circumstances in which secular Yiddish is spoken (Peckarer, 2011, p.238). In the case of secular Yiddish, together with other languages that have been subjects of persecution and which for many speakers no longer serve as a daily vernacular, even intermediate language usage is always for a specific purpose, that of engaging in a "created language space" and language activism (Margolis, 2023, p.15; see van der Meer, 2021 for a discussion of language activism in Yiddish and Catalan) – and as Avineri notes such uses are embedded in linguistic ideologies, including an orientation toward nostalgia (Avineri 2014). This in turn often informs language pedagogy, requiring a modified approach that borrows from models of communicative language teaching but recognizes the limitations or blind spots of teaching for ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines when those standards may not always clearly apply to the language.

These and other similar standards, including those proposed by the National Council for Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL) are, as Khezri has explained in the context of teaching Kurdish as a stateless language in the United States, at times "insufficient for offsetting a stateless language's intersection and multiple axes of marginalization, statelessness, suppression, discrimination, and soft and hard linguisticide" (Khezri, 2021, p. 49). While Khezri refers here specifically to policies in North American higher education as a result of an unbalanced and biased attitude toward stateless languages, and not to proficiency standards per se, the assumptions of what intermediate proficiency should look like for *all languages* as outlined by ACTFL do not fully represent the real-world language use of Yiddish and other stateless languages. The ACTFL proficiency guidelines have also come under critique as being too Eurocentric, requiring the development of language-specific modifications for non-European languages whose grammatical features were not well

represented by the normative standards of the original oral proficiency guidelines (see, for instance, Bernard et al., 2020).

The challenges of teaching LCTLs that may not fully align with ACTFL's standards are also related to the rewards of teaching such languages: "Because the LCTLs are often immigrant, ethnic group or heritage languages, their teaching and learning points with great clarity beyond the classroom and points with great urgency to struggles and shifts pertaining to languages and cultures in the contemporary world" (Byrnes, 2005). Although this study aims at describing a specific use of Yiddish in the academic domain, it also points more broadly toward the limitations of generalized target language functions for the specific circumstances of languages that do not easily fit these models. Indeed, a domain analysis for contemporary Yiddish usage (in both Haredi and secular spheres) would likely prove informative for language instructors, as may be the case for a variety of minoritized LCTLs, particularly as LCTL instructors typically draw from limited materials (e.g., well-designed textbooks) and fewer online and other resources, and must be targeted in where they devote their limited time and resources (Baumann et al., 2024).

As Margolis has noted in her work on contemporary secular Yiddish language usage and transmission in Canada, academic Yiddish language use is one of several "created language spaces" in which secular Yiddish is transmitted: "Created language spaces form the heart of the dispersed and mobile culture that has grown up around secular Yiddish" (Margolis, 2023, p.15). Such spaces offer "sites for ongoing language use" through structured events and opportunities (both in person and, increasingly, digital) at which Yiddish is spoken, read and performed with the express purpose of language revitalization (Margolis, 2023, p. 15; Margolis 2021; see also Biskowitz, 2020, Biskowitz, 2021, and Legutko, 2017 for a further discussion of digital Yiddishland). Such purposes constitute a "spectrum of practices in which community members engage as they seek in the present to combat circumstances in the past" that led to the language's endangerment that, as Avineri argues, in the case of Yiddish are located at the intersection of heritage language and language revitalization/maintenance efforts (Avineri, 2012, p. 12). Avineri further describes that in such language spaces, "nostalgia socialization" is a part of the linguistic instruction – students of the language are taught not only how to speak or read or write in the language but how to *feel* about it – and, as Avineri critiques, this ideological approach tends to limit the scope of what is taught and create boundaries around "authentic" usages of the language (Avineri, 2014, p. 19). Language uses in such "created language spaces" are not all strictly academic, and further domain analyses outside the scope of this study could prove fruitful in understanding the language functions necessary for contemporary secular Yiddish language use in a variety of real-world applications, such as musical performance, theater, and activism, that Margolis has identified as essential sites of contemporary secular Yiddish language transmission, as well as perhaps offer new ways to correct against the ideologies Avineri problematizes (Margolis, 2023; Avineri, 2014) Indeed, acknowledging academic purposes as its own domain of Yiddish language use opens up the possibility of study for other domains separate from the academic sphere, in which such academic uses do not dominate.

The study that follows, however, is limited to examining the target domain of Yiddish for the purposes of graduate academic study in history and literature in higher education in English language environments, such as universities in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia. This study is limited to this particular language use because, as others have shown, language learners, including LCTL learners, have various goals for learning a language, and instructors who keep these goals in mind are better situated to "teach purposefully and appropriately to suit students' goals" – in this case, the goal of navigating the graduate

academic field of Yiddish successfully (Bimpong 2019; see also Back et al., 2009; Badshah & Kahn, 2017; Tse, 2000). The study has been limited to English-speaking environments in particular because of a supposition that language use may look different in other language contexts. While there would likely be significant overlap in the domains of language use for Yiddish in academia in German, Hebrew, Polish, and other language environments, a separate domain analysis for those environments – as well as for environments outside of academia – might be useful in order to create the most precise understanding of the range of target domains, given differences in language environments and academic cultures (For insight into the Polish academic context for Yiddish instruction, see Geller, 2006). In the case of this study, higher education refers to graduate study and beyond, not necessarily directly in the field of Yiddish language study per se, but in fields in which Yiddish is a tool for academic research, such as Jewish history, literature, musicology and anthropology. The study focuses on secular Yiddish, recognizing that separate competencies would almost certainly be required for those studying contemporary Hasidic Yiddish, which is outside of the scope of this project. To do this, the study asked the following research questions:

- What language knowledge, skills, and abilities do graduate students working with Yiddish in academic environments need to have mastery over in order to function in the domain?
- What skills gap do graduate students currently face between what they can do when entering these environments and what they feel they are expected to be able to do, or what they would like to be able to do in order to perform their academic work?
- What obstacles do graduate students face in achieving their language learning goals?

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to gather in-depth insights into the target domain of Yiddish for the purposes of graduate academic study in history and literature in higher education in English language environments. This study was conducted through a series of surveys, distributed over the software platform Qualtrics, including both selected-response and open-ended questionnaires, with stakeholders in the field of academic Yiddish in English-speaking environments. The study utilized a non-probability sampling method to recruit these stakeholders. More specifically, a purposive sampling technique in which the researcher used her expertise to select a sample that is most useful to the purposes of the research as well as a snowball sampling technique, where some of the participants were recruited via other participants. To collect the data, the questionnaires were circulated via email, leveraging personal networks as well as social media networks such as “Yidforsh,” a Facebook group for researchers in Yiddish.

Separate anonymous questionnaires were sent to four key groups:

1. Faculty Mentoring Graduate Students who are Working with Yiddish

The survey was distributed among faculty who mentor graduate students working with Yiddish, in efforts to understand the expectations and requirements they have for the KSAs graduate students working with Yiddish should acquire.

Nine faculty members responded to the survey, representing major universities in the US and Canada. These faculty members were from the fields of history and literature. 77% of these respondents had more than ten years of teaching experience in their current positions, and they teach a variety of courses related to Yiddish, such as History of Yiddish, Jewish Languages and Society, History of Jewish Migrations, Russian-Jewish Literature and Culture, Methods in Yiddish Studies, and the Yiddish Short Story. Several of these faculty members also reported teaching language courses such as Intermediate Yiddish, Literary Translation, and Yiddish for Reading and Research.

## 2. Yiddish Language Instructors

Language instructors are essential stakeholders in these conversations. They understand how students are currently being taught, what resources are currently available and whether or not they are serving students in achieving their goals. They can speak to the populations of students they typically teach, their knowledge and background and their goals. They can also discuss how their curricula are currently designed and whether/how they align with faculty goals for student language use.

Nine language instructors responded to the survey, representing major universities in North America and the United Kingdom. These instructors hold a variety of positions from tenured faculty to lectureships. They represent a range of experience from relatively new to veteran language instructors. All of the respondents hold PhDs in fields related to Yiddish, such as Yiddish Studies, Yiddish History and Culture, Jewish Studies, Germanic Studies, and Linguistics. They reported teaching Yiddish language courses for elementary, intermediate, and advanced students. The majority of these instructors have held their current position for over ten years, with two reporting holding their position for 5-7 years, and one for 1-3 years.

## 3. Archivists and Librarians

Because many students pursuing graduate studies pertaining to Yiddish are required to do archival research, a questionnaire was sent to archivists and librarians working with Yiddish-related collections about the language skills they feel it is necessary for graduate students to possess in order successfully navigate their research.

The five respondents to this survey reported working at university libraries, independent research facilities, and public libraries. Two of those who responded had been in their current position for more than ten years, two had been in their positions for 5-7 years, and one reported holding their current position for 3-5 years. Each of them described the collections they work with as having primary and secondary source material including print materials and handwritten letters and documents.

## 4. Graduate Students

One of the most essential communities to learn from in triangulating the domain of Yiddish language use in graduate academic environments is the graduate student population itself. Students were asked about their experiences in graduate programs

and whether and how they feel that their language classes prepared or failed to prepare them for the language functions they are required to perform in graduate settings.

Ten students responded to the survey, all of whom attend graduate programs in North America.

The surveys consisted largely of open-ended questions. The surveys were kept relatively short to encourage a higher response rate. Faculty were asked eleven questions, language instructors were asked thirteen questions, librarians and archivists were asked seven questions, and students were asked eleven questions. Sample questions included:

For faculty:

- What do you expect from incoming graduate students in terms of Yiddish language background to be able to enter your program?
- How would you describe the Yiddish language skills necessary to succeed in the graduate-level work you supervise related to Yiddish?
- What texts do graduate students need to be able to navigate in graduate-level work with Yiddish? What skills do you think they need in order to read these texts?

For language instructors:

- What skills do you aim to teach in your Yiddish language classes? Please be specific.
- To what extent do you think your students are prepared to learn these skills?
- What resources (e.g., coursebooks, materials) do you currently use to teach these classes? Please be specific.
- Can you briefly describe your teaching philosophy?

For librarians and archivists:

- What do graduate students working with Yiddish usually visit or contact the institution for?
- What challenges do graduate students working with Yiddish typically face as they do archival work?

For students:

- How do you currently use your Yiddish language skills? Please be specific.
- What do you hope to do with your Yiddish skills in the future?
- Do you see a skillset gap between what you can currently do with Yiddish and what you would like to do with it? Please be specific.
- To what extent do the Yiddish classes you are taking/have taken prepare you for what you need or want to do with Yiddish?

After the data was collected, the researcher performed a thematic analysis to closely examine the data. More specifically, the data collected from various participant groups were compiled in separate Excel spreadsheets. Then, the researcher read and took notes about the data, following which a coding scheme was developed through close examination of the data. Although some general themes were “prefigured” and guided the coding process, other codes emerged during the analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Then the researcher examined the

codes to identify patterns and common themes resulting in merging several codes into one common theme. In other words, there were multiple stages of coding, from a more general open coding to a more focused coding in a second round (in this, the researcher was guided by Atkinson & Coffey, 1996). To increase intra-coder consistency, these themes were reviewed and edited in consultation with an external coder from the Office of Language Assessment (OLA) at the University of Chicago Language Center. During the final phase, these themes were named and described. The entries in the Excel spreadsheet were then sorted according to the codes, allowing the researcher to see their frequency and to read responses grouped in similar fashion alongside one another. This allowed the researcher to then interpret the data, abstracting beyond the codes to understand and present the larger meaning of the data, which have been presented here in narrative form (the researcher was guided, in particular, by Bernard & Ryan, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2017; and Esterberg, 2002).

## RESULTS

This study set out to understand what language skills graduate students working with Yiddish in academic environments need to have mastery over in order to function in that domain. What follows is a summary, based on the research, of those KSAs, as well as a discussion of the skills gap students currently face between what they can do when entering these environments and what they feel they are expected to be able to do, or what they would like to be able to do in order to perform their academic work. Finally, there is a discussion of obstacles facing students in achieving their language learning goals.

### Language Skills

Faculty members described having fairly basic expectations for Yiddish language skills and knowledge for students entering their programs. Three faculty members referred to “intermediate or advanced levels” in broad strokes, with two faculty members mentioning specifically the ability to pass an exam for reading comprehension as a basic necessity for their programs. One faculty member described further, “I expect them to be able to read in Yiddish well with a dictionary.” All faculty members expected “growth throughout” the graduate program, several of them describing students who had entered their programs without any knowledge of Yiddish and acquired the language during the course of the program itself.

Few language instructors are teaching courses specifically with the domain of graduate academic use in mind. Therefore, students who have had Yiddish language instruction before coming to graduate school are generally coming from classes in which language instructors described a four skills approach: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

### *Reading in Yiddish, and Translating*

Although faculty members cited fairly basic overall expectations, when describing reading skills, faculty expectations appeared to be rather high. One faculty member described expecting a “high degree of reading fluency” and another described the “ability to read with [a] high level of sophistication.” Others were specific about the kinds of material they hoped students could master, such as reading from a Yiddish newspaper or journal or the ability to perform “manuscript work.” Most faculty members explained that the skills students need depend highly upon the nature and scope of their dissertation project. But whatever the project,

one faculty member explained, students' reading abilities should be such that they will not be "hampered in choice of sources because they were in Yiddish."

Graduate students likewise placed a strong emphasis on reading skills. They described a wide variety of ways in which they employ Yiddish in academic settings. Responding to an open-ended question about how they use Yiddish in their graduate-level study, many described reading a variety of sources as the skill that received most attention. Students use Yiddish in their research, for example in their dissertation research, and describe looking at digitized historical newspapers, archival collections, institutional records, and correspondence (handwritten and typed). Five of the nine students specifically mentioned primary source texts from archival collections and digitized historical documents, three of the students described translation as an essential skill for their academic work. Students also deploy Yiddish in class work ("reading, discussion, presentations, responses" one student succinctly explained).

While language instructors described reading as one of the four skills that they teach, the heavy emphasis on reading that both graduate students and faculty members expressed was not reflected in the instruction that language instructors described. Language instructors offer texts with reading comprehension questions and discussion, and several mentioned introducing students to a variety of text types, such as poems, historical documents, and essays. One instructor, acknowledging that "my students were (I think understandably) not primarily learning Yiddish to use it as an everyday language," sometimes turned to English when discussing a complicated text.

### *Speaking in Yiddish*

Few faculty members described speaking as a necessary skill in this domain, although one described expecting that students can "carry on a basic conversation" in Yiddish.

Yiddish language instructors, on the other hand, reported a strong emphasis on speaking in language classes. They described typical assignments such as oral presentations, class discussions, and responding orally to questions about a written text. When asked about typical class activities, they described discussions, performing dialogues and skits, small group guided conversations and spontaneous discussions, show and tell presentations, and encouraging students to ask questions. Several instructors specifically mentioned the communicative approach, which places an emphasis on spoken communication, as important in their language pedagogy.

While spoken Yiddish may not have been identified as the most significant skill from an academic research perspective, it is one that graduate students nevertheless desire for personal goals. When asked about their long-term goals with the language, five students described increasing their use of spoken Yiddish, including "speak[ing] more Yiddish around other Yiddishists whenever possible" and "integrat[ing] Yiddish into my personal life." Two students also specifically mentioned a desire to speak Yiddish to present or future children. Four students specifically cited identity and connection to family and communal history. As one student explained that a leading motivation in Yiddish language learning was "To build a bridge to the prewar world of my grandparents" while another cited a desire to "connect with community, tradition and ancestors." Two students described a desire to "participate in the contemporary Yiddish scene in arts [and] culture." Many of the students described personal Yiddish use beyond their academic roles and environments. One student reported speaking Yiddish with a romantic partner and with a friend, another described speaking Yiddish with her mother and reading Yiddish books to her baby. Seven of the nine students described using

Yiddish in social settings and having gained friendships through shared interest in Yiddish language.

When asked about long-term academic/professional goals, only two students described speaking Yiddish in a professional context outside of language instruction: (“I hope to be able to... give high level lectures in fluent Yiddish”; “Lecture in Yiddish”).

In addition to research needs, graduate students also reported both a need and a desire to teach Yiddish language. All of the students who responded to the questionnaire were either currently teaching Yiddish or had experience teaching, and three students described having received training in Yiddish language pedagogy. Two of the graduate student respondents, when asked about their long-term professional goals, mentioned becoming Yiddish language instructors (only one faculty member, when asked what students’ long-term goals in Yiddish were, mentioned language instruction). Such teaching requires the spoken use of Yiddish, a usage that was not directly described in their discussions of “academic” uses of Yiddish.

### ***Writing in Yiddish***

Writing in Yiddish is a skill that very few informants mentioned at all. It did not come up in the faculty members’ responses. One graduate student expressed a desire to write original Yiddish compositions but explained that “that would come after a degree of fluency (linguistic and cultural) that still feels very far away!”

Language instructors, however, do report asking students to write in Yiddish, especially in assignments produced outside of class time. Students are asked to write short compositions in Yiddish, answer written questions about short readings, prepare grammatical exercises, and in one case to write original short stories and poetry.

### ***Listening in Yiddish***

Few students described a need for practice in listening comprehension, and no faculty members discussed this skill specifically. However, one student explained a desire to be able to listen to historical recordings as well as to recordings of contemporary Hasidic speakers, and a frustration that the Yiddish language instruction they had heretofore received did not focus on these skills.

Language instructors, however, did mention teaching listening skills on numerous occasions, describing “listening to recordings and extracting information from them” as a typical activity, as well as watching films and performing other “listening activities.”

### **Research Skills**

Faculty mentioned specific research skills they expect students to have in order to succeed in academic settings. Spelling and handwriting came up several times: One faculty member referenced Yiddish paleography (the ability to read handwritten documents) and orthography (understanding spelling and its non-standard variants), while another mentioned the ability to “find someone to help when they come up to handwritings and spellings that they cannot decipher.” In addition, faculty members mentioned dictionaries repeatedly. Students need to be able not only to read with dictionaries (as four faculty members mentioned explicitly), but have, as one faculty member described it a “deep familiarity with a variety of dictionaries” and reference texts in order to support their reading and research. As one faculty member

explained, students also need “[a] sense of relevant digital and other archives/resources to determine scope of research, as well as key reference works.” One faculty member described students needing to have “experience using archival materials.”

In discussing the skills they needed to acquire in order to be successful in Yiddish studies in academia, graduate students also mentioned research skills. One student named bibliographic resources and databases they have only recently learned about and admitted, “I am still not sure I would know how to put them to use for a new research project.”

## Skillset Gaps

By and large, graduate students expressed contentment with the preparation that the Yiddish classes they took before graduate school gave them for their current environments. Seven out of the nine students described satisfaction with their Yiddish education. As one student explains, “I believe the classes I took prepared me for working as a researcher with Yiddish materials.” Three students praised Yiddish classes for encouraging them to conduct discussions in Yiddish, two students praised their classes for introducing them to a variety of Yiddish texts.

Nevertheless, even in curricula that focus heavily on reading, some graduate students feel ill-prepared for the level of reading necessary for graduate level programs. One student described having encountered “a few pages of a simple biography or a short poem” in language courses, and then arriving in graduate school with the expectation that they would be able to read an entire novel. Another student described needing to read modernist poetry: “I’m now an advanced student by most Yiddish language class standards, but there’s still a big gap between where I am now and where I need to be to do my research to the highest degree.” Another graduate student concurred, “sometimes there’s a gap between being an ‘advanced’ student and being able to do a deep and close reading of Yiddish literature.”

Although the graduate students largely did not identify speaking skills as the most important for research purposes, six of them responded adamantly about disappointment in their ability to speak the language. As one such student explains, “It does not prevent me from accomplishing my research goals, but I do wish the courses I took... would [have] put more emphasis on talking.” Another student explained that Yiddish language courses did not prepare them for using Yiddish in “daily life” or speaking “a more natural and accurate Yiddish.” One student described impostor syndrome when speaking Yiddish, especially in front of native speakers “I am self-conscious...wary of pushback I will receive for my inevitable errors.”

Another area in which graduate students expressed concerns about a gap between their abilities and what they would need to succeed is in research and archival skills. Five students described such skills as lacking, three in particular mentioning struggling with reading handwritten documents. Archivists and librarians, who described interacting with graduate students in the capacity of reference consultations, likewise explained that graduate students often face difficulties in reading primary sources in archival settings. According to these archivists and librarians, this is because “most learn standard Yiddish but [are working] with primary sources that are nonstandard” or because of an “inability to read handwritten documents.” These respondents also described graduate students as lacking knowledge about how archives work in general or knowledge of particular reference works in the field of Yiddish that would aid in their research.

## Obstacles to Learning

Graduate students identified several obstacles to meeting their language learning goals for Yiddish. When asked about the challenges to their Yiddish learning, four students discussed problems with articulation or the lack of appropriate levels in Yiddish language instruction. Several students felt that there are not sufficient courses to teach at the relatively advanced level they have now achieved. A student who had attended summer language programs explained that “I felt like the curriculum plateaued and it wasn’t worth it to continue in these spaces,” while another complained, “there is so much more to learn to reach my goals and I’ve been at a loss for years about how to progress further.” Such concerns are echoed by some faculty members – one faculty respondent complains of “lack of advanced course offerings” as an impediment to student achievement.

Students also cited obstacles to Yiddish language learning outside of directly curricular concerns. Three students cited time as an obstacle: “With my courseload and other projects... there is no time to take additional Yiddish courses”; “Having Yiddish once a week is really not a lot of time to spend working in a language” and three cited cost: “I rely heavily on scholarships and grants to support my study.” One cited imposter syndrome, and another cited personal goals that differ from those that have become the norm in academic settings: “there is a bit of condescension in some academic settings toward those who are interested in living and speaking in Yiddish, versus reading exclusively.” Finally, one student described experiencing transphobia in Yiddish courses and summer programs that impacted their ability to learn in those environments.

## DISCUSSION

Currently, there is significant variation in how Yiddish is taught beyond the beginning level, especially as the library of textbooks for students beyond the elementary level is sparse. Advanced Yiddish courses are often not designed with clear pedagogical goals. Yiddish instructors scrambling for students at the higher levels may haphazardly cobble together material suiting their students’ interests without attention to a specific target for what proficiency could or should look like in the domain of academic Yiddish language use. The author of this study counts herself among such instructors.

The goal of this project is therefore to offer evidence-based direction for future efforts toward Yiddish curriculum development in higher levels of Yiddish language learning. By triangulating the responses of various stakeholders, this research will help those developing curricula for Yiddish for graduate-level academic purposes to target the specific KSAs that students will be called upon to use within that domain, allowing for a strategic and evidence-based foundation for further curricular development.

This study also has implications for a wide range of languages that might be taught with a focus on the specific purpose of graduate-level academic use. While many recent studies concerning the infamous language-literature divide propose integrating language-focused activities into the upper-level literature classroom in order to support the further development of language proficiency skills in content courses - including the 2007 Report of the Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, which recommended replacing the traditional two-tiered program structure with curricula that merge language and content (Darhower & Smith-Sherwood, 2021; Geisler, et al, 2007; Paesani, 2011; Rose, 2022; ), this study suggests that there may in fact be a need to disaggregate these approaches and bring

philological and reading proficiency skills to the forefront of courses taught *with the specific purpose* of preparing students for an academic realm in which the literature may be read both closely and extensively, but not spoken about in the target language (for a study that delineates such philological and reading skills, see Shelton, 2023). This does not discount or contradict the importance of collaborative dialogues, or other approaches building oral communication and discussion into the literature classroom, for improving oral proficiency development among upper-level students who hope to use the language in a variety of domains (Rose, 2022). Rather, it suggests that the domain of graduate academic study requires particular kinds of language use. It is a pragmatic acknowledgement that the language-literature divide exists and persists, whether or not we would like it to, and courses preparing students to thrive in academic settings should be preparing them to work on the literature side of this divide. Courses designed toward the specific purpose of graduate academic language use should therefore have a different focus than a more generalized course. Much of the publishing, public presentations, and teaching by academics studying histories and literatures outside of English is performed *in English* – studying a language for an academic purpose is therefore very different than studying it for business, medical, travel, recreational, or many other purposes. These findings about the KSAs necessary to function in the domain of Yiddish for academic purposes will very likely resonate for a wide range of languages for academic purposes, including but not limited to LCTLs.

What emerged from this study was that a course focusing on the specific purpose of Yiddish for academic use requires a differentiated set of priorities in which not all of the traditional four skills should be targeted at the same level, and additional philological skills should receive attention.

Across all groups, it is clear that graduate students working with Yiddish in academic settings primarily need to be able to read a variety of texts, both historical and literary, closely and deeply. This research has also demonstrated that, together with reading skills, basic Yiddish research skills, such as knowledge of available resources like dictionaries, databases, and how to use them, as well as knowing how to navigate an archive, are necessary for functioning in academic environments with Yiddish. These skills are, in the context of academic Yiddish, necessary skills for the way the language is used within the domain, and are far more relevant than the general language paradigms such as the ability to survive (sometimes called survival competence) in so-called “real life” situations (such as how to find your way out of the rain in the target language) that are often the principle measurable objective of a general language course according to the communicative approach.

The importance of research skills as a vital component of academic language usage is a finding that could deeply impact future course design and are likely to be relevant for those teaching for academic usage in other languages as well as Yiddish. Such skills may be key to aiding students in bridging the language-literature divide should they wish to enter literary studies in an L2.

As noted above, many students who work with Yiddish in academic settings do so with personal motivations to become advocates or activists for the language more broadly, or bring their area of study into their identity, sense of purpose and their social and communal lives. Nevertheless, while students may have goals for the KSAs they want to achieve with Yiddish outside of the academic environment, these functionalities fall outside the scope of the specific purpose of professional Yiddish language use in graduate level academic settings and should not necessarily be prioritized in the development of curricula dedicated to this specific purpose. This is not to disparage the importance of these skills for learners of Yiddish in a broad range of fields or to suggest that they are not important for the overall transmission

of Yiddish between generations of speakers and learners. Rather, it is to suggest that in a course targeting Yiddish for the *specific purpose* of functionality in graduate level academic study, listening and writing should be deprioritized in order to shape the curriculum toward the apparent goals of reading and research skills. When teaching Yiddish for academic purposes, the instructors should be clear about what KSAs are required for these purposes, and communicate this prioritization to their students, suggesting that students gain KSAs that fall outside these parameters, should they desire them, in other courses or environments. This researcher heartily recommends such courses for students wishing to use Yiddish in other domains – curricular development toward a course on Yiddish for academic purposes does not in any way preclude students’ taking other courses on Yiddish for a wide range of other purposes. Indeed, a word of caution is advised: as Avineri has found, Yiddish instructors’ focusing on receptive skills rather than active production of the language tends to go hand-in-hand with a temporal focus on the past that can “implicitly elide and/or deride the current Yiddish of Hasidic Orthodox speakers” and “this elision and derision may come from ideologies that locate authentic and authoritative Yiddish speakers in the past as opposed to the present” (Avineri 2014, p. 23). Instructors attuned to the real-world use of Yiddish in academic settings should be explicit in conveying to their students that the Yiddish they are teaching is certainly not the only form of Yiddish, nor the only “real-world” usage for Yiddish, nor is it a “better” Yiddish than other contemporary Yiddish uses. Rather, it is Yiddish for the specific purpose of accessing literary and historical materials that are most commonly the subject of study in the academy. When students enroll in an LSP course on Yiddish (or any language) for academic purposes, they should be informed about course offerings and the goals of the course should be made explicit, as students’ expectations and understanding of what new knowledge the course will impart impacts student motivation (Nedashkivska & Sivachenko, 2017). This allows students to understand how the language they are learning that is specific to their domain fits into the broader world of the language writ large.

## CONCLUSION

This study allowed us to define the Yiddish KSAs students need in higher education settings in English-speaking countries when pursuing degrees in which working with Yiddish is a significant component. To be able to function in the academic Yiddish domain, students much be able to:

- Read, comprehend and interpret with use of dictionaries or other resources literary texts of various lengths from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries and spanning multiple genres, but primarily literary prose.
- Read and comprehend with use of dictionaries or other resources a variety of historical texts including newspapers, journals, institutional documents, personal correspondence and manuscripts and other printed or hand-written materials.
- Translate excerpts from a wide variety of sources to use in research or scholarly writing.
- Recognize and be able to decipher handwriting and non-standard spelling variants when reading or working with written materials.
- Possess extensive knowledge of and ability to draw upon resources for research including a wide variety of dictionaries, broad/deep resources for Yiddish

paleography and orthography, key reference works, and digital and other archives as well as other sources of print material.

- Possess extensive knowledge of bibliographic resources and databases related to Yiddish studies.
- Write in Yiddish in order to facilitate note-taking or other writing that supports reading and research.
- Comprehend spoken Yiddish when read aloud from written source materials in scholarly discussions or other settings.
- In the case where it is a programmatic priority that students have the speaking skills to discuss texts and research skills in Yiddish, that skill can be considered, but it would change the nature of the test being developed and have an enormous impact on course design and development. The research shared in this study prioritizes reading skills to the exclusion of speaking skills, but an argument could be made for prioritizing them. This could be particularly important in programs in which graduate students teach Yiddish as part of their professional life while in graduate school or for whom language instruction is a potential career path.

These findings will be operationalized through the creation of an assessment to determine students' success according to the above goals. This assessment will in turn serve as the basis for an evidence-based, reverse designed curricular development project for a course on Yiddish for academic purposes.

This process could be replicated for other languages in order to create a broader understanding of how to teach language specifically to students who are aiming at graduate study in English-language environments in the humanities, working with sources from a target language. A focus on philological and extensive reading skills rather than productive writing or speaking skills might well be relevant for other languages in this use domain; more research is required in other languages to demonstrate this point. Analysis of the domain supports a pragmatic approach that prepares students for the way the target language is actually used for academic purposes. An assessment-driven, proficiency-oriented reverse-design approach to teaching in this domain makes it possible to share practices across institutions, and even across languages, as new proficiency standards are developed with specific domains in mind (Baumann et al., 2024). Once similar proficiency goals are established, there are opportunities for collaboration on courses across languages in the academic domain with comparable unit structures and designs, common pedagogy and similar learning goals (For an example of such collaboration in LCTL settings outside of LSP, see Lys, et al, 2024). This domain exploration and analysis is an important first step in establishing curricular goals for languages for specific purposes and demonstrates the necessity of treating academic usage as a specific domain of language use.

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