

Inflectional paradigms have bases too: Arguments from Yiddish

It is widely recognized that within derivational paradigms, forms may be constrained to resemble their bases, even when the result is otherwise illegal. For example, in English, derived forms may disobey the general process of vowel reduction in order to match their bases (*cond[ɛ]nse* ⇒ *cònd[ɛ]nsation*), but not vice versa (*tang[ɛ]ntial* ⇒ **táng[ɛ]nt*). In contrast, members of inflectional paradigms are not obviously derived from one another, and their influence is commonly thought to be more egalitarian. McCarthy's recent OPTIMAL PARADIGMS (OP) proposal codifies this distinction by hypothesizing that derivational paradigms always refer to privileged bases, but inflectional paradigms never do. He observes that this hypothesis leads to an interesting prediction: since inflectional paradigms have no base, faithfulness to a marked allomorph is never enforced, and paradigms should strive to be globally unmarked ("attraction to the unmarked"). In this paper, I provide several counterexamples from Yiddish, in which inflectional paradigms have leveled to become more marked. This supports a model in which bases play a role not only in derivational paradigms, but in inflectional ones as well (Kraska-Szlenk 1995, Albright 2002).

Middle High German had final devoicing, creating alternations in noun paradigms, as in (1a). Early in the transition to Yiddish, however, final devoicing was rendered opaque by apocope ((1b)). Finally, devoicing was "lost", along with most inflections ((1c)) (Sapir 1915; Kiparsky 1968; Sadock 1973; King 1980).

(1)	'way'	a. MHG		b. Early Yiddish		c. Modern Yiddish
	Nom.	vek	vegə	vek	veg	veg vegən
	Acc.	vek	vegə	vek	veg	
	Gen.	vegəs	vegə	vegəs	veg	
	Dat.	vegə	vegən	veg	vegən	

After apocope ((1b)), the pattern is no longer analyzable as straightforward devoicing, because of the existence of surface forms like [veg]. Under the "standard" analysis (Kiparsky 1968), the final devoicing rule is ordered after final schwa-apocope, so it does not apply in words with underlying schwa. In OT, this effect might be captured as faithfulness to a candidate that retains the schwa, either as an existing surface variant (Steriade 1997; Kawahara 2002), a sympathy candidate (McCarthy 1999), or a virtual candidate (Bye 2002). Crucially, however, any analysis of stage (1b) must claim that in the nominative/accusative sg. forms, the basic final devoicing ranking continues to hold (ban on voiced codas » IO-Faith(voice)), since here there is no final voicing contrast. Thus, final devoicing is still active, but it is not surface-true.

Superficially, it appears that the change from (1b) to (1c) involves the promotion of IO-Faith(voice) and demotion of the final devoicing constraint, resulting in a uniformly faithful paradigm. There is evidence that the change was *not* due to a simple demotion of final devoicing, however. First, the change proceeded slowly and word-by-word, as is typical of analogy (Weinreich 1958; King 1980). Even in Modern Yiddish, a few words retain alternations ([ganəf]~[ganovim] 'thief') or remain voiceless ([hunt] 'dog'). Furthermore, coda devoicing still plays a role in determining the outcome for voicing disagreements in obstruent clusters, both finally (/lib-t/ → [lipt], not *[libd]) and often also medially (/kabtsən/ → [kaptən])

'pauper', but /kɑpɔn/→[kɑpɔn], not *[kɑbɔn] 'stickler'). Finally, noun paradigms have undergone other levelings that do not involve voicing, such as copying long vowels from the plural (*[tag]→[tɔg] 'day-sg.', like the original plural form [tɔg]). All of these facts suggest that the change was not a simple markedness demotion, but rather a paradigmatic effect, in which singular forms were rebuilt to match the plural, in spite of their .

The loss of final devoicing thus represents a case of "attraction to the *marked*," predicted to be impossible in a theory that lacks inflectional bases. The change is easy to capture with inflectional bases, however: nom.sg. [veg] is like *cònd[ε]nsátion*, copying an otherwise illegal voiced obstruent from elsewhere in the paradigm. Here, it appears that paradigms are constrained to resemble the plural, where voicing surfaces faithfully. Why would plurals be privileged in this way? It is generally assumed that if inflectional paradigms have bases, they must be morphosyntactically unmarked members of the paradigm, such as singulars (Bybee 1985, Kenstowicz 1997; McCarthy, in press). Albright (2002) has argued, however, that bases of inflectional paradigms are determined not by morphosyntactic markedness, but rather informativeness in revealing lexical properties. In Yiddish, plural forms are considerably more informative than singulars, since they reveal not only final obstruent voicing, but also which plural suffix the noun takes. Thus, the attested leveling is correctly predicted.