Language Syncretism and the
Hybridization of Religious Jewish Identity
in Postmodern America

MASTERS PROJECT

Chaya Nove

Applied Linguistics

Teachers College, Columbia University

February, 2011

1 INTRODUCTION

In the popular musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye the milkman struggles to protect his family and Jewish religious traditions from the outside influences that encroach upon their lives. Orthodox Jews in America today strive to carry on that same legacy, albeit in an environment that is wholly different from 1905 Tsarist Russia. For Tevye and his real-life contemporaries of the Eastern European shtetl[1], religious persecution served as a constant reminder of Jewish status. In contrast, the democratic climate of religious tolerance and increasing secularization of society in America today necessitates ongoing self-definition and construction of identity for those who wish to maintain a traditional Jewish lifestyle. The preservation of traditional religious practices must involve successful negotiation between the secular and the traditional and, consequently, religious Judaism going into the 21st century is evolving in unanticipated directions.

Studies analyzing the connection between language and identity have discovered language shifts that occur in response to changing group needs and identification practices. In addition, the past ten years has seen an increasing interest in the distinctive speech patterns of religious Jews. In reviewing these studies a common theme emerges, one which connects linguistic variation with shifts in modern Jewish identity. The implications of these new discoveries are great, as they offer new ways of analyzing discourse and social interaction. We discover that the speech patterns of individuals and groups not only reflect personal identity and attitude towards the 'other,' but are also utilized strategically to manage the multiple identities of a single individual and possibly to reconcile dichotomous or multivalent roles. This paper attempts to synthesize recent scholarship in the area of language and identity among

[11] shtetl is a Yiddish term for a small Jewish town or village which originated in Eastern Europe.

contemporary religious Jews in America, and to highlight the common findings that may be shedding new light on this topic.

The second section of this review offers a theoretical framework for considering language as a marker of Jewish identity. It discusses recent views on language and ethnicity and examines how these theories relate to American Jewish identity. The third section provides background information on Jewish language varieties, initially considering the literature on Jewish languages, then focusing more specifically on a distinctive variety some scholars are calling 'Jewish English.' The fourth section reviews studies by Benor (2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2011), Fader (2009), Levon (2003), Sacknowitz (2007), Steinmetz (1981), Tannen (1981), Schiffrin (1984), and Ullman (2001) investigating Jewish language at multiples levels, i.e., lexicon, phonology, lexical semantic and discourse style. A variety of examples to illustrate the language points are gleaned from reviews by Benor (2009) and Gold (1985), and from a dictionary-style reference by Rosten (1989). The final section summarizes the findings on language and Jewish identity and synthesizes them into a representation of the complex interplay between Jewish language and identity in postmodern America. A sampling of an actual online discussion on the use of Yiddish loanwords is included as an Appendix, as it highlight some of the language points illustrated in the paper.

2 LANGUAGE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Although the delineation of ethnicity is fraught with difficulties, there is a consensus among most scholars today that ethnic categories are socially constructed and can be understood within interactional contexts only (Fought, 2006). Identity construction is recognized as a joint process shared by an individual, the members of his group, and the greater society (Smelser, et

al., 2001). Bucholtz and Hall (2005) define identity as “the social positioning of self and other” and argue for a view of ethnic identity that is “interactionally emergent” rather than static and externally produced (p. 587). Fought (2006) points out that, according to Bucholtz, “ethnic self-definition may shift for a multiracial individual even within the span of a single conversation” (p. 16). Additionally, Fought (2006) mentions the existence of a possible “continuum of differences” among ethnic groups, based on how many salient physical and cultural markers separate one group from the next (p. 13). Thus, an individual’s ethnic identity is seen as fluid, not fixed. It is a mutable construct whose shifting borders are constantly negotiated both by the individual and society.

Language is an important element in the process of identity construction. Goffman (1967) emphasizes that there is a “function relationship between the structure of the self and the structure of spoken interaction” (p. 36). Eastman (1985) offers a method for analyzing linguistic practices that draws attention to the distinctiveness of a particular social group. She describes language varieties that exhibit a unique cultural vocabulary, context-sensitive topics and common attitudes. Eastman (1985) proposes that the distinct features of ‘group talk’ are obtained gradually by individuals as they become socialized into a group. When two or more ethnic groups, each with its unique language variety, maintain contact with each other for a long period of time, their linguistic practices may either become more similar – a phenomenon described as *convergence*[2]; or they may move further apart, evolving and changing in discrete ways – a process termed *divergence*[3]. Wolfram (1987) discusses this issue with regard to African-American dialects and hypothesizes about the factors that are responsible for these mutations.

[2] *Convergence* is defined as “the adjustment of a language variety over time to become more like another dialect or other dialects” (Fought, 2006, p. 219).
[3] *Divergence* is defined as “the development of a language variety or language structure so that it becomes more dissimilar from other varieties or structures” (Fought, 2006, p.220).

Ultimately, it appears that the direction of change of any language variety will largely depend on local ingroup and outgroup[4] attitudes. In summary, there is overwhelming evidence in the research of sociolinguistics and related fields that speakers use language in distinct ways to highlight, reinforce and develop their own identity and/or to ascribe an identity to their fellow interlocutors (Fought 2006). As Barret observes:

> Speakers may heighten or diminish linguistic displays that index various aspects of their identities according to the context of an utterance and the specific goals they are try to achieve … This practice implies that speakers do not have a single "identity" but rather something closer to what Paul Kroskrity … has called a "repertoire of identity," in which any of a multiplicity of identities may be fronted at a particular moment. In addition, … speakers may index a polyphonous, multilayered identity by using linguistic variables with indexical associations to more than one social category. (as cited in Fought, 2006, p. 20)

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) offer an approach for examining identity and linguistic interaction that takes into account the multiple layers that are operative in identity construction. Their approach draws on important works in the areas of language, culture and society. It consists of five principles that underscore the idea that individuals, intentionally or otherwise, utilize a wide range of discursive strategies in social interactions to construct a personal identity.

Benor (2010) too emphasizes the mutable approach to ethnic identity, and argues for the view of language variation as an arsenal (also espoused by Gumperz 1967) to try to explain the role of language in the process of identity construction. Seeking to avoid the contradiction between the flexibility of ethnic identity construction on one hand, and the study of fixed

[4] An 'ingroup' is defined in the literature as a social group to which an individual feels loyalty. 'Outgroup' is the social group that is at odds or in competition with one's own, often resulting in an attitude that is negatively biased.

language varieties, or 'ethnolects[5],' on the other, Benor proposes the 'ethnolinguistic repertoire,' defined as "a fluid set of linguistic resources that members of an ethnic group may use variably as they index their ethnic identities" (p. 160). Linguistic resources for members of a particular group may vary on the level of the lexicon, phonology, morphosyntax, paralinguistic features, and discourse styles, and may also involve code-switching in a bilingual setting. Benor argues that once the distinctive repertoire of a particular group is identified, it is easier to analyze how it is used, in conjunction with the local language, in a variety of contexts to index identity. She anticipates via this approach to overcome some of the main problems inherent in the study of language and identity, namely, intra-group and intra-speaker variation, outgroup use, and the delineation of ethnicity and 'ethnolects.'

2.1 JEWISH IDENTITY IN THE POSTMODERN ERA

Recent studies of Jewish ethnic identity reflect the changing attitude towards ethnicity described above. Myhill (2004), who claims that ancestry and religious affiliation, not language, have been crucial for determining Jewish identity historically, nevertheless admits that there exists a Jewish identity crisis brought on by modernization, and that consequently the established criteria for Jewish identity may need to be reconsidered. Tsvi Blanchard, an Orthodox[6] Jewish rabbi, explains why the old measures of assimilation and acculturation to gauge Jewish identity in America have become obsolete as Jews as a group become increasingly "socially secure, powerful and affluent" (2002, p. 1). Judaism in America, he argues, has ceased to be a matter of

[5] The term 'ethnolect' has been used to refer to a variety of the majority language used by a particular ethnic group (Benor, 2010).

[6] Jews can be largely be grouped into Orthodox, Conservative and Reform—with the Orthodox group adhering to the most stringent form of religious observance. Heilman and Cohen (1989) further divide Orthodox into Traditionalists (a.k.a. Ultra-Orthodox or Haredi), Centrists (or Modernists) and Nominals. Ultra-Orthodox groups tend to be highly sectarian, and the most fundamentalist division among them, the Hasidic Jews, has retained Yiddish as their primary language.

cultural transmission. Instead, he proposes a paradigm of Jewish identity that acknowledges the formation of new cultural identities for American Jews based on "individual freedom of choice" (p. 7). His new model takes into account the fact that Jewish identity has become "*fluid and linked to life context*" (emphasis in original, p. 9). Blanchard notes:

> By and large, in contemporary America, individuals *believe that they have the right to choose* their own identity and the ways it is publicly expressed. In a shared culture of individual choice, each of us expects the others to recognize and *validate* our personal choices, however idiosyncratic these choices may be. (p. 8, emphasis in original)

The culture of personal choice described by Blanchard (2002) has created new challenges for members of all ethnic groups, including those who describe themselves as Orthodox Jews. American society is becoming increasingly more secular and culturally mobile. No religious restrictions or policies exist to remind an individual of his cultural or religious status. Jews who wish to maintain their traditional way of life must independently create the lines between themselves and the proverbial other, and engage in ongoing identity work to maintain those boundaries. Heilman (2006) discusses the conflict between the religious and the secular in America, and the unanticipated ways in which Orthodox Jews are responding to these tensions:

> In this [postmodern] world, one often can avoid the either/or option of fragmentation and choose the both/and one of provisionality. In this framework one need not be either contrapuntalist[7] or insular, modern or Haredi; one can actually be both—in a role and distant from it at once. That is why managing impressions, poses, and the ability to play many roles at once is so much part of today's world and today's American Orthodoxy. (p. 304)

[7] Heilman (2006) uses the term 'contrapunctalist' to describe Orthodox Jewish groups who believe that participation in the secular world does not necessarily diminish Jewish identity and commitment.

Jewish identity in the postmodern era seems to have moved well beyond ingroup/outgroup dichotomies. In negotiating the realms of the modern and the traditional, religious Jews are developing a hybrid sense of self that incorporates elements of disparate worldviews. Furthermore, as will become clear later in this review, it is among the most fundamentalist Jewish factions that the most intense identity negotiation, and hence even greater hybridization, is most evident.

2.2 LANGUAGE AND JEWISH ETHNIC IDENTITY

Jewish language is so tightly interwoven with ethnic identity that it is almost impossible to talk about the former without referencing the latter. As Steinmetz (1981) notes, "Jewish English[8] is recognized […] as an expression of Yiddishkeit [9]or Jewishness. The Individual who fails to understand or communicate in this form of speech is spotted as an outsider" (p. 4). Other linguistic scholars have expressed similar beliefs, taking into account not only language as a reflection of ethnic identity, but also as a tool for self-identification and ethnic identity production (Benor 2010: Isaacs, 1999). Myhill (2004) believes that, in the face of changing identity needs, speaking a distinctively Jewish language has become ancillary to Jewish people in the last 120 years. Heilman (1981) suggests that the modern American Orthodox Jew is engaged in an ongoing process of negotiation between the religious, parochial world of his heritage and the secular, cosmopolitan one of his country. As a participant observer in a Modern Orthodox Talmud class, he observes the language variation among the participants and argues that their language shifts "echo and abet" the movement into and out of the various personal realms they occupy (p. 227).

[8] Jewish English is a term some linguistic scholars are using to describe a language variety unique to English-speaking Jews. A more detailed discussion of this so-called language variety follows later on in this review.
[9] Yiddishkeit refers to Jewish tradition, culture, or heritage; or the state of being Jewish

Indeed, a distinctly Jewish variety of American English seems to be operative not only as a means of alignment and distinction between Jews and non-Jews, but it is also widely used by Jews to distinguish themselves from among each other (Benor, 2009). A linguistic system exists among Orthodox Jews of various factions that is complex and effective in performing ingroup identity. A particular segment of Orthodox Jews who are very closely affiliated with their educational institutions have developed a vocabulary that is highly pervasive and recognizable in most areas of Orthodox Jewry as "Yeshiva-talk" or "Yeshivish" (Steinmetz, 1981; Benor, 2009). Some examples are *gradeh* 'actually,' *gevaldig* 'awesome,' and *lav davke* 'on the contrary.' A recent book entitled *Frumspeak: The First Dictionary of Yeshivish* offers a comprehensive translation of "Yeshivish" for the unaffiliated (Weiser, 1995).

A number of studies of linguistic practices among Orthodox Jews have taken into account these emerging theoretical frameworks of ethnic identity and language use and have made some fascinating discoveries. The following section looks at the literature that defines and delimits the features of a distinctly Jewish language.

3 WHAT IS A JEWISH LANGUAGE?

> To celebrate his mother's eightieth birthday, Seymour Flick sent her a bottle of champagne and a jar of caviar.
> That afternoon he telephoned.
> "Oh, Seymour! *Thank* you for the wonderful present!"
> "You liked it, Mama?"
> "The ginger ale I *loved,* dollink; but tell the store that those little black berries taste from herring!" (Rosten, 1989, p. 189)

Most Jewish people, or those in regular contact with Jews, will identify the above segment as a "Jewish joke," even though it offers no direct ethnic or cultural references.

Although it is presented entirely in English, the astute reader will recognize the characteristic addition of the voiceless stop /k/ in the word "darling," as well as the word "from" being used as "of," which is a well-known "Yinglishism" (Rosten, 1989, p. 188) The syntactic clue is the transposition of the object "ginger ale" into the subject position. Accordingly, most readers will conclude that an ingredient in the humorous quality of this mother/son exchange is its conveyance of "Jewishness" through the distinguishable features of a Jewish language.

Historically, Jews have had a linguistic repertoire that extended beyond the local language of their host country, and have developed an ability to integrate these languages in unique ways. The characteristics that make a language distinctly Jewish have been explored extensively in modern scholarship and a variety of Jewish languages have been identified and analyzed (among them: Yiddish, Judezmo/Ladino, Judeo-Arabic). Fishman (1981) defines a Jewish language (JL hence) as "any language that is phonologically, morpho-syntactically, lexico-semantically or orthographically different from that of non-Jewish sociocultural network" (p. 5 – 6). Weinreich (1980) points out the quality of "fusion" that is characteristic of every JL, consisting of the co-territorial language[10], a classical Hebrew/Aramaic[11] component, and elements of another Jewish Diaspora language (JL). Haarmann (cited in Gold, 1987) asserts that the Hebrew language in particular is an integral component of any language that would legitimately call itself Jewish, but Gold (1985) disagrees, arguing that a Hebrew component is "common, but not essential." Rather Gold (1985) describes a JL more generally as "a lect used by Jews and which provides an adequate organization of their Jewish experience (p. 280). Rabin (1981) suggests a novel description for JL: "as a transitional state between the pre-diglossic

[10] A 'co-territorial' language is used to refer to the local language of the host country
[11] I use the term 'classical Hebrew/Aramaic' to refer to the language of the Bible, the Talmud, and other ancient Jewish texts.

variety and the emancipated language[12] of a Jewish group." Birnbaum (1944) and Wexler (1981) offer less specificity on the features that constitute a JL, and supply only vague assertions that a JL is somehow singular and unique when compared to the local native tongue.

Although researchers may diverge on the exact criteria for a JL, most agree that there is sufficient difference in the languages spoken by the vast majority of Jewish people around the world to justify talking about a JL. Gold (1981) calls this area of scholarship Jewish Interlinguistics (JIL), defined as "the comprehensive and comparative study of the speech and writing of Jews (and related groups) and of their influence on the speech and writing of non-Jews" (p. 31). Wexler (1981) offers a conceptual framework for JIL based on four distinct types, in which he attempts to show the evolutionary sequence that is the basis of all Jewish languages. Wexler's theory has been criticized, but his work has proved inspirational to the ongoing study of JIL.

3.1 JEWISH ENGLISH: THE LANGUAGE OF AMERICAN JEWS?

Linguists who have examined the language of English-speaking Jews living in the United States have identified many linguistic features that seem unique to this group or prevalent among them. Labov's (1966; 2001) classic studies of language variation in New York City found a higher (oh) vowel use among Jewish speakers. Disenhouse (1974) investigated the higher (oh) among Jewish New Yorkers and found greater religious affiliation to be positively correlated with this feature. Other linguistic scholars who have considered the language practices of contemporary American Jews have been loudly making the case for a Jewish variety of English

[12] Rabin introduces the terms 'pre-diglossic variety' to describe a Jewish speech community in which the colloquial language of the majority is indistinguishable from its non-Jewish counterparts, but which maintains the use of classical Hebrew/Aramaic or Yiddish as the High Variety (upper language) in a *diglossic* situation, and emancipated language" as a Jewish speech community in which the majority has "opted out" of *diglossia*, instead raising the Low Variety (colloquial language) to official language status.

(Steinmetz, 1981; Rosten, 1989; Gold, 1985; Benor, 2009; Fader, 2009). In a review entitled "Do American Jews Speak a 'Jewish Language'? A Model of Jewish Distinctiveness" Benor (2009) approaches the issue of a JL in the United States by examining the markedly Jewish "stylistic resources" that various Jewish communities have access to, and which they utilize for the purpose of alignment and distinction (p. 230 – 269). She argues that rather than insisting upon a list of features that must be present in order to render a language Jewish, we ought to compare the language of a particular Jewish community with that of a local non-Jewish group. If a distinctively Jewish repertoire is discovered among English-speaking Americans that is being used for group or individual Jewish presentation then the case can be made for a JL. Steinmetz (1981: 4) asserts that a JL is alive and well in the United States and it is simply a matter of time until it receives scholarly recognition as 'Jewish English' (JE hence).

There has been both serious and light-hearted debate among scholars regarding the appropriate name for this American JL. Rosten (1989) gleefully presents a dictionary to interpret the words, phrases and syntax of this JL he calls *Yinglish*. Feinsilver (1979; 1980) suggests a number of (somewhat ridiculous) terms, including *Engdish, Yidlish, Engbrew,Yidgin English, Engliddish and Yiddiglish.* Gold (1985) scoffs at these "unwieldly" and "corny" assignations, and rejects *English-influenced Yiddish* and *English-influenced Hebrew* on the same grounds. Gold (1981; 1985) instead promotes JE as a collective term referring to any number of lects whose main component is English, are utilized by Jewish people, and vary from the standard non-Jewish language variety. Both Benor and Steinmetz also prefer that term and use it exclusively in their reference to American JL.

The following section examines some of the research that has been done on language variation and JE among American Jews, organized by lexicon, phonology, lexical semantics, and

discourse styles. Additionally, an ethnographic study by Fader (2010) introduces the linguistic practices of a bilingual Jewish community and examines how this contributes to the current understanding of language and Jewish identity.

4 RESEARCH ON LINGUISTIC PRACTICES OFAMERICAN JEWS

4.1 THE LEXICAL REPERTOIRE OF JEWISH ENGLISH SPEAKERS

As Eastman (1985) points out, language contact often produces a unique cultural vocabulary and is a common feature of language varieties. The linguistic repertoire of American Jews includes thousands of loanwords from Diaspora languages, mostly Yiddish, and has been the focus of much of the research conducted on Jewish language patterns. Anecdotally, some of the loanwords, e.g., *shtick* 'typical or signature behavior,' *schmooze/shmooz*[13] 'converse casually,' and *chutzpah* 'audacity or guts,' have become ubiquitous among the general American population and have found their way permanently into the English language. A newly released movie entitled *Dinner for Schmucks* (2011) illustrates this phenomenon. Others loanwords, e.g., *schlep/shlep* 'to carry heavy items,' *knish* 'a filled pastry-like food,' and *shmutz* 'dirt,' seem to be popular among American Jews and non-Jewish people who live in close contact with them (especially in the New York City region), but may be virtually unknown in other non-Jewish American circles. Benor (2011) questions whether features of Jewish languages that are utilized by non-Jews as well can still be considered part of a distinctively Jewish linguistic repertoire, and suggests that the answer is decidedly affirmative:

> If Jews use a feature more than non-Jews, or differently than non-Jews, then that feature might be seen as part of the Jewish linguistic repertoire. Even some features used more

[13] Heilman (1981) points out how the syncretism of the original Yiddish *shmues* and the Standard English morphology produced the word *shmooz*.

by non-Jews might be seen as part of the Jewish repertoire if people use them more with Jewish audiences or if they associate them with Jewishness. (p. 152 – 153)

Steinmetz (1981) and Benor (2009) review an assortment of linguistic distinctions of JE. Steinmetz's data is gleaned from religiously affiliated Jewish publications and what appears to be his own personal knowledge of Jewish speech patterns. Benor's review is based on fieldwork and informal observations among Orthodox Jews over a period of ten years. They find that the greater part of the lexical repertoire available to American Jews consists of loanwords used mostly by Jews with a strong religious affiliation, to describe features of traditional Jewish life. Some examples are words like *shadchen* 'matchmaker,' *chasunah* 'wedding,' *levayah* 'funeral,' *shviger* 'mother-in-law,' *milchik* 'dairy [product],' *cholent* 'slow-cooking Sabbath food' and *talmid chochom* 'learned person' (Benor, 2009, p. 256; Steinmetz, 1981 p. 6). Gold (1985) elucidates the reasons for pervasiveness of loanwords, among them: the need to talk about experiences associated with Jewish living, a strong influence from an archistratal[14] language and the refusal to accept a number of distinctly un-Jewish terms.

When loanwords are inflected for plural form, or when suffixes are added to change the part-of-speech, speakers drawing on the JE repertoire show a remarkable lack of concern for linguistic purity, boldly attaching English suffixes to Yiddish words and Yiddish suffixes to English words. Thus you get *frummies* 'religious types' from *frum* 'religious,' *halachically* 'according to Jewish law' from *halachah*, and from *shlep* 'to drag,' *shleppy, shleppily, shleppiness* and *shleppish.* When inflecting English words in JE you get results like *checkele* 'small check,' and *refusnik* 'Soviet Jew who has been refused permission to leave the USSR' (Steinmentz, 1981, p. 8; Benor, 2009, p. 247). Benor (2009) observes that there is a growing JE

[14] Gold defines an archistratal language as a language that has been supplanted by another language yet continues to be used in some capacity.

vocabulary: "Yiddish words are being used by Jewish adults whose parents did not use them." She attributes this trend to greater religious engagement among young Jews (p. 256).

In addition, many JE exclamations are either in use or easily recognizable as distinctly Jewish by the vast majority of the American Jewish population. Expressions like *oy-vey, gevald* and even *nu!* have become quintessential markers of Jewish identity in movies, television, theater and private conversations. In a dictionary-style book entitled *The Joys of Yinglish*, Rosten (1989) claims that these words are used to project Jewish identity socially, as well as for entertainment purposes. Another popular phrase from the Yiddish *fong shoyn oon* 'start now' is the exasperated appeal: "Be*gin* already!" and the warning: *Don't mix in!* as in 'mind your own business,' directly translated from the Yiddish *mish zikh nisht arayn* (Rosten, 1989, p. 66). Rosten also does not fail to mention the all-important JE tendency to "criticize a person or policy simply by uttering the name as a back-formation with a prefatory fricative of disdain," as in: "Tariffs-*shmariffs*, they are bound to hurt American business consumers" (p. 128).

In a recent study, Benor (2011) conducted a large-scale online survey in which over 40,000 Jewish and non-Jewish participants, all native English speakers residing in the United States, were asked about their ethnic backgrounds and language use. Among the questions were: what percent of their friends are Jewish, do they consider themselves Orthodox, and did their ancestors speak Yiddish. She admits that the survey method may be less than ideal for variationist sociolinguistic research, but argues that it may be the only viable option for a project of this size and scope.

In the aforementioned study, Benor found that some Yiddish loanwords in popular use among both Jews and non-Jews and did not seem to index Jewish identity at all. Rather these words seem to have become part of the vocabulary of the speaker of Standard English. Two

examples are *klutz* 'a clumsy person,' and *shpiel* 'speech, pitch, performance.' Other words, e.g., *kvetch* 'complain,' *mensch* 'good person,' and *maven* 'expert, whiz,' showed more evidence of identity work. A variety of words, e.g., *macher* 'an important person' and *heimish* 'homey,' are apparently used by Jews only. A total of 17 – 22% of Jewish participants, and virtually no non-Jews, admitted to using Hebrew loanwords, e.g., *yofi* 'nice' and *yallah* 'let's go.' A whole category of loanwords appear to be used primarily by religiously oriented Jews. Some of these are *bentsh* 'saying grace after meals,' *davka* 'particularly, specifically,' and *l'chatchila* 'ab initio, before the fact.'

Additionally, Benor found that many participants who knew the meaning of numerous loanwords did not necessarily use them, and that participants who admitted to using more loanwords also had a greater percent of Jewish friends. This supports the theory that linguistic variation is closely related to social interaction.

Also investigated in this study was the partiality for Yiddish and Aramaic or Hebrew loanword choices. Here Benor found that Orthodox Jews preferred Yiddish and Aramaic lexical variants over Hebrew ones. Age was also a factor, with younger people more likely to use Israeli Hebrew alternates. Furthermore, participants reported using different word choices in different social settings and with different audiences. For example, participants reported using more JE words in interactions with Jews than with non-Jews. A previous study by Benor (2004a) also suggests a greater preference by males than females (3.6%) regarding the use of loanwords. Benor (2011) regards these tendencies as evidence of active linguistic control for the purpose of aligning or distinguishing oneself from others. She states that "Jews play with language just as they play with identity" (p. 148). The use of the word "play" once again highlights the

conception of a Jewish identity that is fluid and socially constructed, and emphasizes language use that fulfills a particular role at a particular time for a particular audience.

Sacknowitz (2007) conducted an extensive study of Jewish language use among 26 male and female participants from an Orthodox Jewish community in Fresh Lakes, Maryland; some of whom were affiliated with a Modern Orthodox synagogue and some of whom were affiliated with a synagogue with a more stringent, Ultra-Orthodox inclination. Using sociolinguistic interviews in conjunction with the analysis of a corpus of email correspondence of community members, Sacknowitz examined the speech patterns of participants by employing linguistic variation analysis, acoustic phonetic analysis, and interactional sociolinguistics (to find distinctions in discourse-level features). Though she admits that her own Jewish status may have influenced participants' response to some extent, Sacknowitz hopes that the combination of methods employed for data analysis makes up for any inherent flaws in the study.

Sacknowitz (2007) looked at the use of Jewish loanwords and found that males from both synagogues were more likely to use loanwords than females were altogether, but that both males and females from the Ultra-Orthodox synagogue tended to use a higher percentage of loanwords (males: 1.85%, females: 1.79%) than members from the Modern-Orthodox synagogue (males: 1.34%, females: 1.12%). These findings substantiate the results of previous studies which found a positive correlation between higher use of loanwords and more stringent religious observance.

In another study, Ullman (2001) set out to answer the question of whether Jews in Broome County, an upstate New York community, speak JE. Ullman began her dissertation research as a participant observer at various formal and informal communal and religious functions of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jewish groups in Broome County. She also

conducted unstructured[15] interviews with community members (12 women and 6 men of various ages, 3 of whom were converts to the Jewish faith), eliciting responses on issues of family history and Jewish identity. Additionally, Ullman (2001) collected written surveys from 118 Jewish participants of Broome County, all of whom were at least minimally involved in Jewish community affairs. The surveys focused on Jewish identity and observance of Jewish traditions, as well as on Yiddish and Hebrew language attitude and use. Based on her observations, Ullman (2001) found a positive correlation between observance of Jewish customs and Yiddish and Hebrew use. She also found that when Orthodox and Conservative speakers draw on another language, it is likely to be from Yiddish or Hebrew, whereas Reform speakers draw on Hebrew almost exclusively. As an example, Ullman (2001) offers the greeting *Shabbat Shalom* (Israeli Hebrew) which is used by Reform Jews, as opposed to the *Gut Shabbos* (Yiddish) popular among the Orthodox and Conservative participants. Another example is in the way Reform participants speak about "prayer books" while the Orthodox participants refer to them as *sidders* (Yiddish and Hebrew). Based on the statistical analysis of her data, however, Ullman (2001) found birthplace and attitude to be better predictors of Yiddish and Hebrew use than religious practice. In conclusion, Ullman (2001) determines that religiously affiliated Jews of Broome County do indeed draw upon a distinct JE lexical repertoire to index degrees of Jewish affiliation and identity. She admits, however, that this issue may be more complex than her conclusion implies, since JE consists of more than just the lexical element investigated in this study.

4.2 PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES OF JEWISH ENGLISH

The linguistic repertoire of American Jews usually utilizes the Standard American English phonology, even when Yiddish and/or Hebrew loanwords are used. The characteristic

[15] Ullman (2001) describes an unstructured interview as one that is designed to stimulate the interviewee to talk freely, and over which the interviewer has little control.

trilled /ɹ / of Yiddish and the uvular /□/ of Hebrew are dispensed with in favor of the English retroflex /r/. Only the allophone [x], derived from Yiddish and Israeli Hebrew and often spelled "kh" or "ch", is generally maintained in words like *chag/hag* and *halachah/halakhah*, especially by those closer to the Orthodox pole, (Benor, 2009, p. 246; Steinmetz, 1981, p. 12). Steinmetz (1981) comments on the JE speaker's tendency to revert to the Yiddish /a/ from the English /æ/ or /ʌ / on occasion, for example when pronouncing "mish-mash" as /mɪ ʃ -maʃ / or /sapə r/ in place of /sʌ pə r/, or in articulating the articles "a" and "an," where a JE speaker may say /a/ beggar instead of /e/ beggar (p. 12). An additional identifiable phonological feature of JE is the tendency to de-voice final stops and to add voiceless stops following word-final /ŋ/, as in "darlingk," "wrongk," and "beardt" (Benor, 2009, p. 257).

In a 2001 study, Benor recognized that the glottalized /t/ in word-final position, which is a common occurrence in Standard American English, is rarer in JE, suggesting that properly releasing the word-final /t/ is seen as a characteristic of "learnedness" or among Orthodox and religiously engaged Jews in New York (p. 260). Benor (2001) also showed that men release /t/ more than women (1.4%), and suggested that this marked their identity as possessing greater authority, precision and religious edification than females.

Taking the aforementioned phonological distinction into account, Levon (2003) analyzed the pronunciation of word-final /t/ by two young members of a Reform Jewish community in New York City. He was looking specifically for the allophonic variations of /t/ mentioned above, i.e., release/non-release, glottalization, and deletion. The speech of the two participants was recorded in three different contexts: group interviews at the home of one of the participants, a youth group meeting, and in the classroom of a Reform Jewish religious school. The variation in /t/ production was analyzed in conjunction with the social factors, i.e., speaker, audience and

topic, to determine whether identity work was operative in intra-speaker phonological variation. Levon (2003) found that participants were indeed more likely to delete or glottalize word-final /t/ when talking about secular topics, and release word-final /t/ in a discussion of non-secular topics, albeit the difference was modest. The /t/ release was also more salient in the youth group setting, and less so in the interview setting.

The study cited above seems to confirm Benor's (2001) suggestion that word-final /t/ release is used to index Jewish affiliation. Levon (2003) notes this relationship between Jewish identity and sociolinguistic practice, and sees it as an enactment of "the compartmentalization of Judaism in America" (p. 201). His study ascertains once again the conflicting tensions that are a part of contemporary American Jewish identity, and the way in which a distinctive linguistic repertoire functions in the management of this conflict.

Additionally, both Sacknowitz's (2007) and Benor (2011) analyzed the biblical /Ɵ/ realized as [t] (Israeli Hebrew) or [s] (Ashkenazi Hebrew). The former found a definite preference for Ashkenazi Hebrew pronunciation among all age groups, especially the younger ones. In contrast, Benor (2011) found a greater tendency for Israeli Hebrew pronunciation among the younger participants of her study. When comparing male and female pronunciation, Sacknowitz (2007) found a slightly greater female preference for Israeli Hebrew pronunciation, confirming a previous suggestion by Benor (2004b) that Ashkenazi Hebrew pronunciation indexes greater religious learnedness among Jewish males.

Sacknowitz (2007) also followed up on previous studies by Labov (1966) and Disenhouse (1974) by conducting an acoustic analysis of the phonological qualities of "COT" and "CAUGHT," and found no correlation between the higher back manifestation of (oh)

attributed to Jewish speech and religious affiliation. Apparently the (oh) distinction is a feature of a more specific New York City Jewish language.

4.3 LEXICAL SEMANTICS OF JEWISH ENGLISH

Other elements in the JE lexicon are original English words and/or phrases that carry special meaning when used by American Jews. The word *hold* is used in JE, mostly by Orthodox Jews, like the Yiddish word *halt* 'accept, believe in,' and the word *learn* is usually dedicated to *Torah* 'Bible' study, as in "He learns in the evening" (Benor, 2009, p. 258). The word *from* is often used in JE instead of "about," "by," "of," or "with," as in "He's the king from Jordan" (Rosten, 1989, p. 188). *By* is a bivalency[16] of the Yiddish *bay* 'at,' and is used by many English-speaking Jews to indicate 'at the house of,' as in: "Are you eating *by* Rabbi Fischer?" (Benor, 2009, p. 257; Fader, 2009). The phrase *give over* in JE means 'to communicate, impart' and is derived from the Yiddish *geb iber* (Benor, 2009, p. 257).

Other English words, though not derived from a distinctly JL, are simply used and understood differently by Jews than by non-Jews, because of the way they relate to Jewish life and experience. Two examples would be the word *continuity* which is understood by speakers of JE to mean 'Jews having children', or 'the overall number of Jews not decreasing,' and *MOT* (Member of the Tribes, i.e., a Jew) (Benor, 2009, p. 260).

4.4 JEWISH ENGLISH SYNTAX

Perhaps the most prominent of JE features, beyond the lexicon, are its syntactical differences. Fronting the predicate adjective or the object of a sentence is a hugely popular way of performing Jewish identity. Statements such as "Lucky, you can't call her," or "She's quite

[16] Fader (2010) defines 'bivalency,' as "a word or sound that belongs simultaneously to at least two linguistic systems." She also talks about 'interference,' which occurs "when two linguistic systems are simultaneously applied to the same linguistic system, such as using a Yiddish accent while speaking English" (p. 92).

pretty, the girl," speak volumes about the speaker's Jewish ethnicity (Rosten, 1989, p. 5). Benor (2009) mentions the JE affinity for the distinctive post-verbal adverbial phrases, such as "You'll be stuck studying *all day* Torah," or "I was able to pick up *pretty well* the lingo" (p. 257). A popular JE marker for perfect present tense is using the present tense, plus the word *already*, as in "I know someone *who's already frum* (religious) for twenty years," instead of, "I know someone *who has been* religious…" (Benor, 2009, p. 257). Beginning an exasperated interrogatory phrase "again with…?" is another idiosyncrasy associated with JE, which is derived from the Yiddish *shoyn vider mit* 'already with.'

4.5 JEWISH DISCOURSE STYLES

Tannen (1981) and Schiffrin (1984) identified a discursive style which is distinctly Jewish, and which must therefore be included in any discussion of language and American Jewish identity. After taping a Thanksgiving dinner conversation of which three participants were Jewish and Native New Yorkers, Tannen (1981) concluded that New York Jewish conversational style consists of distinct characteristics in topic, genre, pacing and expressive paralinguistics. Of these, she pointed to the overlapping and latching tendencies, and the accelerated speech rate, as the most observable features. Tannen (1981) also claims that New York Jews tell more stories in which the point is the narrator's emotional experience. Schiffrin (1984) examined the use of argument as a vehicle of sociability, based on interviews with Jewish people in lower-middle class urban Philadelphia. She concluded that the historical value placed on argument among Jews has always been positive, and as a result a culture of arguing-as-a-way-of-being-social has evolved, which remains an important element of the way Jewish people converse. Schiffrin (1984) is quick to note that the argumentative style is not unique to Jewish

people, but it emerged as a salient feature of the Jewish people she interviewed and must thus be included as a discursive feature of JE.

The stylistic repertoire of English-speaking Jews also includes unique ways of using the interrogative form, such as the tendency to answer a question with a question (e.g., replying to "How do you feel?" with *"How should I feel?"*) and the excessive use of rhetorical questions in ordinary conversation, e.g., *"So what do I do? I go in the house. And what do I see? All the chairs turned over"* (Gold, as cited in Ullman, 2001, p. 131). Some have gone so far as to describe a repertoire of body language that is uniquely Jewish and includes certain shoulder movements, facial expressions and other gestures. (Ullman, 2001).

Most of the research on Jewish discourse styles was done in the 1980s, including the ones cited above. New studies focusing on this area, using more recent theoretical frameworks of language and ethnicity, would likely yield a more nuanced understanding of language variation at this level.

4.6 HASIDIC ENGLISH

Thus far this review has focused on the language practices of mostly monolingual, English-speaking American Jews. When the speech practices of bilingual, Yiddish-speaking Jews are examined, a whole range of issues come into play. Traditionally, sociolinguistic studies have used code-switching as a framework for examining the linguistic identity work performed by bilingual speakers. Fader (2010) suggests that more recently the focus of academic study in bilingual contexts has shifted from code-switching to a broader consideration of how communication is made more meaningful through the integration of multiple languages used simultaneously, intentionally or otherwise. Integration can occur at all levels of language (e.g.,

lexical, phonological, and syntactical), and can even blur the boundaries between the speech genres inherent in disparate languages.

Fader (2010) applied the participant observer method (endorsed by Eastman, 1985, for linguistic variation analysis) to study the language patterns of a nonliberal[17] *Bobover*[18] Hasidic community in the Borough Park section of Brooklyn, New York. She hoped to discover what propels the desire of young women and girls to perpetuate Hasidic traditions by analyzing everyday language and the practices by which young girls are socialized into their future roles. Applying theories of gendered language shift and linguistic syncretism, she discovered that Hasidic Jews speak a distinct variety of English she calls "Hasidic English" (HE hence) which is largely a lexical, phonological and syntactical amalgamation of English, Yiddish and *Loshn-koydesh*. In one example, Fader quotes an informant's directive to her daughter: "Well, you can make extra. I'll anyway need *flaysh* for *sikis,*" to illustrate the use of lexical borrowing (*flaysh* for 'meat,' *sikis* 'the Jewish harvest holiday'), and syntactical interference (Yiddish has a more flexible word order, allowing for the placement of the word "anyway" almost anywhere in the sentence.) She also notes the prevalence of Yiddish calques,[19] such as the idiomatic expression "break her teeth," from the Yiddish *brechen di tzayner* 'break the teeth' to refer to a linguistically difficult feat.

Hasidic women, according to the Fader (2010), are both the originators and the perpetuators of HE, which is fashioned out of the collective everyday experiences of members of the group. Although young girls are socialized to speak Yiddish, they gradually shift from

[17] Fader eschews the more common but somewhat contentious term 'fundamentalist' in favor of 'nonliberal' to describe this religious community
[18] *Bobov* is the name of a particular Hasidic sect.
[19] Yiddish calques are nonstandard English phrases or sentences resulting from direct translation from Yiddish to English (Fader, 2010).

bilingualism (Yiddish and English) to HE, which is considered more modern or cool, starting in grade school.

The emergence and perpetuation of HE suggests a process of sanctification of the English language through syncretic transformations. The binary distinctions between the secular and the spiritual thus become somewhat blurred. For young Hasidic girls, speaking HE has become associated with what Fader (2009) calls a unique 'North American Hasidic femininity.' Hasidic females can achieve greater access to the secular world through HE than can Hasidic males (who speak primarily Yiddish), yet still continue to index their Hasidic Jewish identity as they do so. The creation of HE can be seen as a model for the construction of a blended identity for the postmodern Hasidic female.

5 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The accelerated rate of modernization in the past century or two has forced many countries and religious groups to rethink their ideology. In the United States especially, a culture of democracy and individual choice, combined with the more recent mass access to information, has forced many citizens to question established religious convictions and to examine which elements of their ethnic traditions remain viable. Myhill (2004) believes that Jews are responding to modernization by adapting, rather than abandoning or changing, their cultural beliefs. There is evidence to support the claim that modernity has resulted in the slow evolution of religious Jewish life in two disparate directions. According to Heilman (2006), the Orthodox Jewish reaction to a secular society that is ever more accessible has been both an increasing stringency in religious observance as well as greater participation in the secular world. Soloveitchik (1994) too notices a "swing to the right" among observant Jews, and a declining demarcation between

the various Jewish factions (p. 64). Fader (2010) suggests that even Hasidic communities are becoming both worldlier, choosing the elements of popular culture they can adapt for their personal use, as well as more rigorous in their religious practices. The shifting social configuration among America Jews validates Hudson-Edwards' (1980) argument for a more "wholistic, as opposed to atomistic," approach for analyzing the complex interplay of language and ethnicity (p. 72).

The literature reviewed in this paper indicates a subtle but definite divergence of the language practices of religious American Jews from Standard American English. In spite of Myhill's (2004) insistence the Jews are no longer creating Jewish languages, a number of scholars are illustrating that religious Jews in America posses a unique linguistic repertoire, and project that the use of this language variety is likely to increase and become more pervasive in the near future. Fader's (2010) study shows that language creation among religious Jews in America is still very much a dynamic process, and may be useful as a paradigm for thinking about postmodern hybridization of identity. Isaacs (1999) writes: "Language maintenance and perhaps even a modest revival appear likely for Yiddish in the foreseeable future" (p. 27). And Benor (in press) boldly predicts that twenty years hence even Reform Jews will be using more, instead of less, Yiddishisms[20] in religious contexts.

A common theme seems emergent in recent scholarship of Jewish language and ethnicity: As lines between Jews and non-Jews, religious and secular Jews, and Jews of different sects continue to blur in the context of everyday life, religious Jews continue to draw upon a unique linguistic repertoire as a way of compartmentalizing the secular and the religious and re-asserting individual and group identity in various contexts. While stylistics may be an unconscious

[20] Loanwords derived from Yiddish

element of the discourse of religious Jews, the research shows that particular lexical, phonological, syntactical and semantic elements are utilized to perform the complex identity roles that postmodern American culture calls for. In a social climate that has created a more fluid American Jewish identity, self-definition takes on greater importance, and language use becomes a crucial means of straddling the realms of modernity and religiosity.

REFERENCES

Benor, S. B. (2001). The learned /t/: Phonological Variation in Orthodox Jewish English. In T. Sanchez & D. E. Johnson (Eds.). *Penn Working Papers in Linguistics: Selected Papers from NWAV 29.* Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Linguistics.

Benor, S. B. (2004a). Second style acquisition: The linguistic socialization of newly orthodox jews. ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing). ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, , n/a. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/305128350?accountid=10226.

Benor, S. B. (2004b). *Talmid Chachams* and *Tsedykeses:* Language, Learnedness, and Masculinity among Orthodox Jews. *Jewish Social Studies, 11*(1). 147 – 169.

Benor, S. B. (2009). Do American Jews Speak a "Jewish Language"? A Model of Jewish Linguistic Distinctiveness. *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, *99*(2). 230 – 269.

Benor, S. B. (2010). Ethnolinguistic repertoire: Shifting the analytic focus in language and ethnicity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 14*(2). 158 – 183.

Benor, S. B. (2011). *Mensch, bentsh,* and *balagan:* Variation in the American Jewish linguistic repertoire. *Language & Communication, 31*(2). 141 – 154.

Benor, S. B. (in press). Echoes of Yiddish in the Speech of 21st Century American Jews. In L. Rabinovitch, H. Pressman & S. Goren (Eds.). *Choosing Yiddish: Studies on Yiddish Literature, Culture and History.* Detroit: Wayne State Press.

Blanchard, T. (2002). How to Think About Being Jewish in the Twenty-first Century: A New Model of Jewish Identity Construction. *Journal of Jewish Communal Service, 79* (1).

Bucholtz, M. & Hall, K. (2005). Identity and Interaction: A sociolinguistic approach. *Discourse Studies, 7*(4-5). 585 – 614.

Disenhouse, D. S. (1974). *Phonological manifestations of ethnic identification: The Jewish community of New York City*. New York: Disenhouse.

Eastman, C. M. (1985). Establishing Social Identity Through Language Use. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 4*(1). 1 – 20.

Fishman, J. (1965). Yiddish in America: Socio-Linguistic Description and Analysis. *Internation Journal of American Linguistics*, *31*(3). 1 – 94.

Fishman, J. (1981). The Sociology of Jewish Languages from the Perspective of the General Sociology of Language: A Preliminary Formulation [Electronic version]. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 30*. 5 – 16.

Fought, C. (2006). *Language and Ethnicity: Key Topics in Sociolinguistics.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction Ritual.* New York: Anchor. p. 36.

Gold, D. L. (1981). Jewish Interlinguistics as a Field of Study. *International Journal of Sociology of Language, 30*. 31 – 46.

Gold, D. L. (1985). Jewish English. In J. Fishman (ed). *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages.* JLeiden: E.J. Brill. 280 – 298.

Gold, D. L. (1987). Recent Studies in Jewish Languages (Review Article) [Electronic version]. *Language in Society*, *16*(3). 397 – 407.

Heilman, S. & Cohen, S. (1989). *Cosmopolitans and Parochials: Modern Orthodox Jews in America.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Heilman, S. C. (1981). Sounds of Modern Orthodoxy: The Language of Talmud Studies. In J. Fishman (Ed.). *Never Say Die.* The Hague: Mouton.

Heilman, S. C. (2006). *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Hudson-Edwards, A. (1980). Sociolinguistic Reflexes of Jewish Identification. *International Journal of Sociolinguistics, 26.* 41 – 74.

Isaacs, M. Haredi, *haymish* and *frim*: Yiddish vitality and language choice in a transnational, multilingual community. *International Journal of Sociolinguistics, 138*. 9 – 33.

Labov, W. (1966). *The Social Stratification of English in New York City.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Labov, W. (2001). *Principles of Linguistic Change: Social Factors.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.

Levon, E. (2006). Mosaic identity and style: Phonological variation among Reform American Jews. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 10*(2). 181 – 204.

Myhill, J. (2004). *Language in Jewish Society: Towards a New Understanding*. Buffalo: Multilingual Matters LTD.

Rabin, C. (1981). What Constitutes a Jewish Language? *International Journal of Sociology of Language, 30*. 19 – 28.

Rosten, L. (1989). *The Joys of Yinglish.* New York: McGraw-hill.

Rosten, L. (2001). *The Joys of Yiddish.* New York: Three Rivers Press.

Sacknovitz, A.. Linguistic means of Orthodox Jewish identity construction: Phonological features, lexical features, and the situated discourse. Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, United States -- District of Columbia. Retrieved January 13, 2011, from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text.(Publication No. AAT 3271069).

Schiffrin, D. (1984). Argument as Sociability. *Language in Society, 13*(3). 311 – 335.

Smelser, N. J., Wilson, W. J., & Mitchell, F. (Eds.). (2001). *America Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences, 1*. Washington DC: National Academy Press.

Soloveitchik, H. (1994). Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy. *Tradition, 28* (4).

Steinmetz, S. (1981). Jewish English in the United States. *American Speech*, *56*(1). 3 – 16.

Tannen, D. (1981). New York Jewish Conversational Style. *International Journal of Sociology and Language, 30*. 133 – 149.

Ullman, B. E. P. (2001). Jewish English as an ethnic speech marker: A lexical study of an upstate New York community. Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton. Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text. (Publication No. AAT3006880).

Weinreich, M. (1980). *Yiddish Language*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Weiser, C. (1995). *Frumspeak: The First Dictionary of Yeshivish.* Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson.

Wexler, P. (1981). Jewish Interlinguistics. *Language, 57.* 99 -149.

Wolfram, W. (1987). Are black and white vernaculars diverging? In Fasold et al. *American Speech, 62*(1). 40 – 48.

APPENDIX

On January 14 I posted the following question on FaceBook:

New Yorkers: what are some words of Yiddish origin that are familiar to non-Jewish New Yorkers, but not to the general American population?

The following are some of the replies, which I believe contribute to the discussion in this paper:

Timothy Pracher-Dix Schlep. New Yorkers like to complain about schlepping.
January 14 at 3:08pm ·
Allegra Marino my irish catholic mother (born and raised in the bronx) would always tell me to wipe the "schmutz" off my face. my italian-american dad (also born and raised in the bronx) calls cocktail party talk "schmoozing". both terms i believe are of yiddish origin.
January 14 at 3:28pm via Facebook Mobile ·
Ian Blood I can tell you, though, that 'schlep' and 'schmooze' are also known to Illinoisans. However, I grew up in Chicago where there is a large Jewish community, so probably not typical of what one would hear in, say Decatur :) I never heard Schmutz in Illinois.
January 14 at 3:32pm ·
Tara Tarpey I love this question, Chaya! Growing up in New York, Yiddish has always worked its way into my vocabulary. Aside from the ones already mentioned, I grew up using "mashugana," "mensch," "kibitz," and of course, "oy vey," which I'm pretty sure are all Yiddish. I also know quite a few rather more ribald words that I can share, if that would be helpful!
January 14 at 3:45pm ·
Chaya Rachel Nv You guys are great, thank you! Tara, this is for my MA paper - I'm writing about language and ethnicity.
January 14 at 3:59pm via Facebook Mobile ·
Chaya Rachel Nv And Ian, I need examples of both, New York Yiddish and US Yiddish, so I'm glad you commented.
January 14 at 3:59pm via Facebook Mobile ·
Carol Elk Putz. Schmuck of course. Futz. Schtoop and kvetch to a lesser degree. Megillah, to mean a long story. But I guess that's hebrew.
January 14 at 4:05pm ·
Tara Tarpey It sounds like a great topic! I thought of two more. I also grew up saying that people had "chutzpah" and referring to complaining as "kvetching." I'm not sure how common these words are outside of New York.
January 14 at 4:15pm ·
Petya Mattys Here's what I can think of: "yutz", "bubbe", "bupkes", "shtick". Hope that helps!
January 14 at 5:26pm ·
Carol Elk Tuchus!
Chaya Rachel Nv Warning: this thread has been rated R for Yiddishly-explicit language
January 14 at 5:36pm via Facebook Mobile ·
Wendy Wallach schvitz, chazari, chatchkas
January 14 at 5:40pm via Facebook Mobile ·
Kawai Wong chutzpah...kvetch...klutz...schmear...spiel...tshatshke...tuches... and challah...
January 14 at 6:12pm ·
Lindsay Marie Wells knish
(I have a funny story about trying to explain the meaning of schlep to an old French man in French, btw... maybe save that for when your project is done :))
January 14 at 10:26pm ·
Allegra Marino haha i forgot about tuchus, yes, we definetly used that growing up!
Yesterday at 10:48am ·
Pamela Notaro We are Jewish and Italian in my family and say "Oy-vey marrone"