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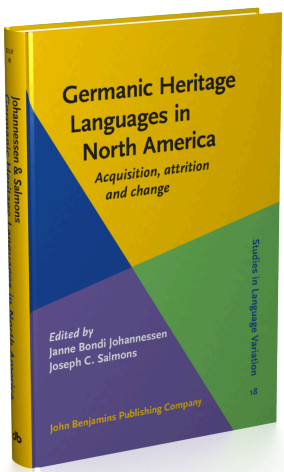

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How synagogues became *shuls*

The boomerang effect in Yiddish-influenced English, 1895–2010

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This paper introduces the "boomerang effect," the resurgence of substrate features that were previously on the wane. Among American Jews, Yiddish loanwords have waned and waxed over the past century, and in the domains of religion and popular culture, we currently see increased use of certain loanwords, including *shul* ('synagogue'), *leyn* ('chant Torah'), *daven* ('pray'), and *chutzpah* ('gall'). This paper offers evidence for this trend using data from a survey about language use, a corpus study of the American Jewish press from 1895 to the present, and analysis of media oriented toward young Jewish adults. These findings are discussed in light of changes in American society and in the Jewish community, as well as the notion of the "third-generation return."

Keywords: Yiddish, lexicon, loanwords, ethnicity, boomerang effect, substrate effect, substratal influence, American Jews, survey, newspaper, Jewish English

1. Introduction

When a minority group shifts to the majority language within a generation or two, what happens to their original language? Does it continue to exert substratal influence on the new language as used by group members? In this paper, I offer evidence that American Jews continue to use lexical elements of their main ancestral language, Yiddish, even several generations after the major wave of Yiddish-speaking immigration (1880–1920) and even when the speakers have little or no proficiency in spoken Yiddish. While some loanwords from Yiddish are on the decline, others are increasing in use.

Data in this paper come from three sources:

a. a survey about language and identity among contemporary Jews, in which correlations between age and the use of specific loanwords give us a sense of change in apparent time;

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b. a corpus study of two American Jewish newspapers from 1895 to the present, in which we see shifts in the use of certain Yiddish loanwords;
c. a synchronic, qualitative analysis of the use of Yiddish loanwords in contemporary media oriented toward young Jewish adults, including a website, a magazine, a book, a film, and a political organization.

First I give background information about Yiddish and about the theoretical approach toward substrate effects, then I present each of the data sources and its findings, and finally I discuss the results in relation to broader trends within American society and the Jewish community.

1.1 Yiddish

Like all the languages analyzed in this volume, Yiddish is a Germanic language, but one with significant influences at all levels from Slavic languages and – mostly in lexicon – from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Jewish varieties of medieval French and Italian. Although its history is subject to academic debate (see, e.g., Weinreich [1973] 2008, Katz 1987, Wexler 2002, Beider 2013), most scholars agree that Jews began speaking a Germanic language in what is now Germany around the start of the second millennium, and when they moved eastward to Slavic lands, they maintained their Germanic language and incorporated many influences from Slavic languages. By the 19th century, Yiddish was well established as the spoken language of millions of Jews in Eastern Europe. Over the next century, the vast majority of Yiddish speakers shifted to local languages, immigrated to the United States, Israel, and elsewhere, or were killed in the Holocaust.

Of the millions of Yiddish speakers who immigrated to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most shifted to English within a generation or two. The most recent United States Census Bureau report, from the 2007 American Community Survey, found that 158,991 people in the United States speak Yiddish at home; most of them are also proficient in English (Shin and Kominsky 2010: 6–7). Many contemporary Yiddish speakers are elderly Holocaust survivors, although their numbers are decreasing due to their advancing age. A large and growing percentage of contemporary Yiddish speakers are Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Jews, especially Hasidim in the New York area (see Kahan Newman, this volume). They tend to have high birth rates (Cohen et al. 2012) and continuing ideological attachment to Yiddish (Isaacs 1999, Fader 2009). In addition, there are a few dozen young non-Orthodox Jews who feel a strong ideological attachment to Yiddish and decide to raise their children speaking Yiddish (Chernikoff 2008). Because of the continued intergenerational transmission of Yiddish in some Hasidic communities, we cannot say that Yiddish is endangered. On the other hand, outside of Hasidic communities, Yiddish use is dwindling and, as Avineri (2012) points out, most American Jews experience and discuss Yiddish as an endangered language.

Although Yiddish use is in decline, researchers have shown that "postvernacular" use of Yiddish is on the rise (Shandler 2006, Avineri 2012, Soldat-Jaffe 2012). Shandler defines postvernacularity as people privileging the symbolic understanding

of a language over its communicative use. In the case of Yiddish, he writes, "the language's primary level of signification – that is, its instrumental value as a vehicle for communicating information, opinions, feelings, ideas – is narrowing in scope. At the same time its secondary or meta-level of signification – the symbolic value invested in the language apart from the semantic value of any given utterance in it – is expanding" (Shandler 2006: 4). There has been an increase in the number of Yiddish festivals and material cultural products, such as t-shirts and refrigerator magnets, and most of the people who engage with these products cannot speak or even understand full Yiddish sentences. Another way that individuals engage with Yiddish in a postvernacular way is through the use of Yiddish loanwords within English, the focus of this paper. While several other chapters in this volume focus on the integration of English loanwords into immigrant languages (e.g., Ehresmann and Bousquette; Eide and Hjelde; and Annear and Speth), this chapter focuses on Yiddish loanwords in the English spoken (mostly) by descendants of Yiddish speakers.

1.2 The boomerang effect

Descendants of Yiddish speakers are not the only group to exhibit a resurgence of substrate effects that had appeared to be on the wane. Researchers have found this pattern in a Cajun community in Louisiana (Dubois and Horvath 2000) and in an Indian and Pakistani immigrant community in London (Sharma 2011a, 2011b). I refer to this phenomenon as the "boomerang effect" because of the curvilinear pattern seen in graphs of these substrate influences:

a. A group closest to the ancestral language uses some substratal features.
b. The next generation uses fewer of these features, often to distinguish themselves from their parents.
c. A subsequent generation expresses interest in their heritage language and uses some of the substratal features more than their parents.

One factor behind the resurgence of substrate effects in these groups may be increasing consciousness about and pride in ethnic and/or regional distinctiveness and perhaps some enregisterment, the process of linguistic features becoming associated with particular groups (Johnstone et al. 2002, Agha 2003, Johnstone 2009; see also Benor 2010). This paper offers evidence for the boomerang effect among American Jews, as well as discussion of the factors behind it.

2. Findings

2.1 Survey

One way to investigate the correlation between age and loanword use is through a written questionnaire asking respondents whether they use specific words. While self-reports do not necessarily reflect actual language use, and therefore should be treated

with some caution, the advantage is that such a method allows us to reach a much larger population than we would with observation/recording of individuals' speech.

In 2008 I conducted an Internet-based survey with sociologist Steven M. Cohen (Benor and Cohen 2011, Benor 2011). The survey asked respondents whether they know and use dozens of Hebrew and Yiddish words (e.g., *shpiel* 'pitch,' *shul* 'synagogue,' *leyn* 'chant Torah,' *chutzpah* 'gall,' *maven* 'expert,' *yofi* 'nice') and other linguistic features (e.g., various New York regionalisms and Yiddish constructions like "she has what to say"), as well as about language proficiency and demographic traits such as age, religious observance, and family immigration history. We invited subscribers to various Jewish and linguistics email lists, as well as about 600 personal contacts, to respond to the survey and forward the invitation to their Jewish and non-Jewish friends. Over 40,000 people responded, including the sample used in this paper: 25,179 people who grew up and now live in the United States, currently identify as Jewish, and report that they spoke only English in the home growing up.

Similar to random samples of American Jews (e.g., Kotler-Berkowitz et al. 2003), the survey sample we obtained is diverse according to age, region, denomination, Jewish educational background, and percentage of friends who are Jewish. Our sample over-represents women and those who are religiously engaged. We cannot make assumptions about the general American Jewish population based on this non-random sample (e.g., 20% of American Jews use word X), but we can conduct analysis of sub-groups within the sample (e.g., reported use of word X correlates with frequency of synagogue attendance). In this paper I focus on a small subset of the survey data, including Yiddish proficiency, nine Yiddish words and constructions, age, and a variable I call "generation from immigration," based on how many of the respondent's four grandparents were born in the United States.

Before getting into details of Yiddish loanword usage, let us look at respondents' self-reports of Yiddish language knowledge (Table 1). Knowing at least some Yiddish correlates strongly with age. Given that the sample includes only people who grew up speaking English in the home, it is not surprising that few respondents in all age groups report proficiency in Yiddish.

Table 1. Yiddish language knowledge, correlated with age.

Age	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75+
N (approx)[1]	1,160	2,857	2,779	5,228	7,550	4,490	1,731
% who report at least "some" Yiddish	15.8	15.1	18.6	29.8	38.1	50.4	63
% who report Yiddish proficiency	1.1	1.3	0.9	1.3	1.3	2.9	7.4

Some might question the use of age as an independent variable in this case, given that Jews in the US are descended from people who immigrated from various places and in various periods, not just from Eastern Europe between 1880 and 1920. If we

1. These Ns apply to all age tables in this paper (although each question had slightly different numbers of respondents, the numbers were very close).

look at "generation from immigration" (number of grandparents born in the US) among descendants of Yiddish-speaking immigrants, we see a similar trend (Table 2). Because both age and generation correlate with Yiddish knowledge, and because they are strongly correlated with each other, the regression analyses reported below are based on a scale combining age and generation.

Table 2. Percent of descendants of Yiddish-speaking immigrants who report knowing at least some Yiddish, correlated with number of grandparents born in US.

# of grandparents born in US	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**0**
% who report at least "some" Yiddish knowledge	16	19	25	31	49

Tables 1 and 2 indicate that Yiddish is in decline: most of the younger respondents and those with more American-born grandparents have little or no knowledge of Yiddish. This is corroborated by anecdotal evidence about children of immigrants preferring English over Yiddish. For example, a second-generation survey respondent wrote in an open-ended question about language, "As with many people of my generation (boomers), my parents kept Yiddish as a 'secret language' when they did not want us to know what they were talking about." Among those who did speak Yiddish in the home, many expected their children to respond in English. Another survey respondent wrote, "I understood everything my grandparents said to me, as we lived with them, but they wanted me to speak back in English: '*Red tzu mir in ainglish.*' ['Speak to me in English.] Therefore I don't speak Yiddish well, but *ich farshtait* [sic. 'I understand']." English was seen as a means of integrating culturally and economically into American society, and most children of Yiddish-speaking immigrants did not value Yiddish maintenance. Therefore, it is to be expected that Yiddish proficiency is low several generations after the mass wave of immigration.

The survey asked respondents whether they use specific Yiddish-origin loanwords within English. Given the decreasing Yiddish proficiency, one might expect that Yiddish loanwords would also be decreasing. As Table 3 indicates, this is the case for several Yiddish words, including *naches* ('pride') and *maven* ('expert'); younger survey respondents are less likely to report using these (and several other words). However, as Table 4 indicates, some Yiddish words are actually increasing; younger respondents are more likely to report using *shul* ('synagogue'), "staying *by* us" ('at our house'), and several other Yiddish-influenced words and constructions.

Table 3. Declining use: % in each age group who report using specific Yiddish words in English.

Age	**18–24**	**25–34**	**35–44**	**45–54**	**55–64**	**65–74**	**75+**
naches ('pride')	43	50	59	72	79	82	84
maven ('expert')	33	48	61	75	84	88	89
macher ('big shot')	31	47	56	71	77	80	79
heimish ('cozy, home-like')	20	33	45	60	68	76	78

Table 4. Increasing use: % in each age group who report using specific Yiddish words and constructions in English.

Age	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75+
shul ('synagogue')	64	64	60	59	52	44	43
good Shabbos (Sabbath greeting, vs. Israeli Hebrew *Shabbat shalom*)	50	49	44	42	40	36	32
leyn ('chant Torah')	30	29	26	27	24	16	8
drash ('sermon')	28	28	25	24	19	15	9
by us (vs. 'at our house'; cf. Yid. *bay undz*)	30	29	26	27	24	16	8

The main factor behind this surprising finding is religiosity. The Yiddish loanwords and constructions in Table 4 are all used predominantly in religious contexts. Even the phrase "by us" is often used in discussions of Sabbath meal plans, as in, "Are you eating by us next Shabbos?" (*Shabbos* is the Ashkenazi Hebrew variant of 'Sabbath' used by many Orthodox Jews, compared to Israeli Hebrew-influenced *Shabbat*, used by many non-Orthodox Jews). The increasing use of these words and phrases in the younger generations relates to the growing importance of religious activities among many younger American Jews. Although a large percentage of Jews, especially children of one Jewish and one non-Jewish parent, are disengaging from religious life, we also see the opposite trend: young Jews re-embracing the religion and culture of their ancestors. This involves not only the use of Yiddish (and Hebrew) words but also increased observance of Jewish religious practices. This is certainly the case for *ba'alei teshuva,* non-Orthodox Jews who become Orthodox (Benor 2012a), but it can also be seen among Reform, Conservative, and other Jews who have intensified their religious engagement.

While we see religious intensification in all age groups, it is particularly pronounced among Jews under 35. Perhaps the age correlations in Table 4 are merely remnants of greater religiosity among younger survey respondents. To check for this, as well as to tease apart other factors, I conducted logistic regression analyses on each word, using several independent variables: a scale combining age and generation ("age+gen"), Sabbath observance, synagogue attendance, Orthodox identity, percent of friends who are Jewish, Yiddish ancestry, having lived in New York, time spent in Israel, and Aramaic knowledge. I found that age+gen has an independent effect on all of them, although it is always weaker than Orthodox identity, Sabbath observance, and some of the other variables related to religiosity (see details in Benor 2011). Even though religiosity plays an important role in American Jews' use of certain Yiddish words, age and generation from immigration are also significant factors. This suggests that the words in Table 4 are increasing in use over time.

2.2 Corpus study

In synchronic research on sociolinguistic variation, we can never be sure that patterns according to age represent changes in progress. It might be the case that individuals change their language as they age (age grading). To supplement the synchronic survey data, I turn to historical data from written Jewish English. First, I selected the word *shul*, which is increasing according to the survey data, and I analyzed its use in articles published by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA). JTA is a New York-based English-language news service with reporters around the world. It provides content for over 100 Jewish newspapers, mostly in the United States. The entire corpus of articles published by JTA from 1923 to 2008 is available online, and it includes a quarter of a million articles.

Because an increase in the use of a loanword might represent an increase in discourse about its referent, it is useful to include non-loan equivalents in the quantitative analysis. Therefore, I searched the JTA corpus for tokens of *synagogue*, *temple*, and *shul*, including the alternate spellings *schul*, *schule*, *shool*, and *shule*. I eliminated any tokens that were names (e.g., Samuel L. Schul), as well as tokens that referred to schools (the word means both 'synagogue' and 'school' in Yiddish). The search function in this database yields results according to article, so an article containing, for example, seven tokens is registered the same way as an article containing only one token. Using these results, I calculated the occurrence of *shul* and its alternate spellings as a percentage of all of the possible words (*shul*, *synagogue*, and *temple*) for each year. As Figure 1 indicates, the use of *shul* increased dramatically in the 1980s. Clearly the findings of the survey are evidence of a change in progress, rather than age grading.

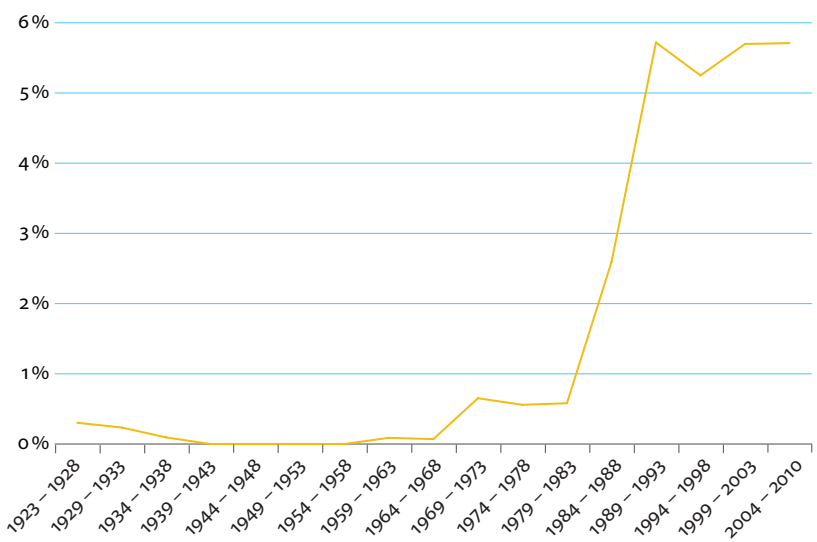

Figure 1. Articles with *shul* as a percentage of total articles with *synagogue*, *temple*, or *shul*, per year, averaged across 5-year periods in JTA corpus.

As *shul* increased in the 1980s, it also acquired a relatively standard spelling. Over the entire period of the study, there are 558 tokens of *shul* and 28 tokens of all of the other spellings combined (*schul*, etc.). All but two of the tokens of alternative spellings occur between 1923 and 1935, and the two that occur in recent years refer to specific synagogues in Australia and France: the Roscoe Street Shule and La Schule.

Even though the use of *shul* has increased significantly, *synagogue* and *temple* are still much more common. For example, in 2005, there were 456 articles with *synagogue*, 151 with *temple*, and 54 with *shul*.

The trend for *shul* is not just about numbers increasing over time; it is also about changing use. In the early years, the word was used mostly in quoted speech, as in a 1930 article: "The non-religious element hotly contest this claim. 'It's these schul people that are to blame,' they say." Many of these tokens are marked as foreign with quotes or italics, as in 1928: "the poor Jew who tried to get into a 'schul' on Yom Kippur without a ticket." There are also a few tokens that are not in quoted speech and are not marked as foreign, as in a 1933 historical article about Shearith Israel, referred to several times as the "Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue":

> Prayers, ceremonials, chants, memorials as well as a living memory of the long-dead who once met in council to devise ways and means of establishing a schul, the first in North America, for the early Jews who settled in Manhattan, lend Shearith Israel dignity and solemnity that are absent from other similarly great institutions.

It is possible that, by using a Yiddish word, this writer was indicating his Ashkenazi roots in contrast to the Sephardi Jews he was writing about.

The word *shul* does not appear at all in the JTA corpus in the 1940s and '50s, a time when Jews in America were generally integrating into American society and working their way up the socioeconomic ladder by entering lucrative professions and moving to the suburbs. In the 1960s and '70s it occurs mostly in the names of historic synagogues, as in "the famous old 'Rashi Shul'" (1961) and "the historic Blue Hill Avenue Shul" (1966), and in quoted speech. Interestingly, it even occurs in a quote from a US-trained rabbi in Iran: "In my shul every Sabbath evening we have more than a thousand people" (1979). This rabbi is not descended from Yiddish speakers but likely learned this word when he attended rabbinical school in the US. There are also a few tokens of *shul* outside of quoted speech.

From the mid-1980s to the present, *shul* has seen broader use. It is still used in the names of historic synagogues and in quoted speech, but it is also used as an alternative way to say synagogue or temple shortly after one of those words has already been used. This 1987 headline is an example: "Vandalism of Synagogue Was Racist, Shul's Lawyer Tells Supreme Court." Sometimes *shul* is used first, as in this headline from 2006: "Extreme Shul Makeover Bringing the Shul to the People: an out of Synagogue Experience." In addition, *shul* is used in reference to Orthodox synagogues, as in 2004: "In a First, Orthodox Shul Hires Woman to Rule on Certain Jewish Legal Issues." It is possible that some writers understood *shul* to refer to Orthodox synagogues and

synagogue/temple to non-Orthodox ones (see Kaufman 1999). Especially in the 1990s and 2000s we also see more general uses, such as a rabbi "who admits sneaking the Macarena into his shul's Simchat Torah celebration" (1997) and "Gay Shul's Siddur Features Prayer for 'Unexpected Intimacy'" (2008).

Shul is not the only Yiddish word that has increased in use in recent years. I also searched the JTA corpus for tokens of *daven*, a Yiddish word for 'pray' that stems from a Hebrew word meaning 'whisper.' I selected this word because the survey data does not indicate that it is increasing in the younger generations. Even so, based on anecdotal evidence, I expected to find that this word was used more in recent decades than in the early part of the 20th century. Indeed, that is the case. In the JTA corpus, *daven* is much less common than *shul* overall, and its increase happened a bit later. There are no articles with *daven* from 1923 through 1970. There are two in the 1970s, one in the 1980s, four in the 1990s, and 16 in the 2000s. (Because the word *daven* is so rare, analyzing it in relation to *pray* would not be helpful.) Most of the tokens of *daven* are in quoted speech, and several are translated as "pray." Based on the lower incidence of *daven* than *shul* in JTA, and the fact that it is used mostly in quoted speech, it seems that *daven* is considered more appropriate for spoken than written registers. Even so, it is possible that, like *shul*, *daven* will continue to expand in numbers and into new contexts.

We see a similar trend with the word *chutzpah* ('nerve, gall'). I selected this word to determine if the increase in Yiddish words can also be seen outside of the religious domain. In the survey data, age+gen has a significant independent effect on the use of *chutzpah* in its negative sense (as in "Can you believe that guy's chutzpah?"): younger Jews are *less* likely to use it than older Jews. Even so, the use of this word has also increased in the JTA corpus over the last few decades, as Figure 2 indicates. This analysis is based on raw numbers of articles with the word *chutzpah*, as no comparable English equivalent exists.

As the analysis of *chutzpah* indicates, it is not only words in the religious domain that are increasing in the Jewish press; it is also words that have become common in general American English. According to my survey data, many non-Jews report using the word *chutzpah*, especially in its positive sense (as in "I really admire that guy's chutzpah"). It has been used in the general American press, even in southern newspapers (Bernstein forthcoming), and Oprah Winfrey gave out the "Chutzpah Award" for a few years. A search on Google's Ngram viewer (which includes Jewish-audience books among its large corpus of English-language books) finds that *chutzpah* was very rare before the 1960s and then increased steadily from the mid-1960s to 2005. It is unclear whether the spread beyond Jewish communities influenced or was influenced by the spread within Jewish communities – probably a bit of both.

The data from the JTA corpus demonstrate that several Yiddish words have increased in the past few decades in a national written venue. To check whether we see the same trends at a local level, I analyzed the use of a few Yiddish words in a second corpus, the Pittsburgh Jewish newspaper, known from 1895 to 1966 as the *Jewish Criterion* and from 1967 to the present as the *Jewish Chronicle*. While I might have selected any city's Jewish newspaper, I selected Pittsburgh's because its back issues

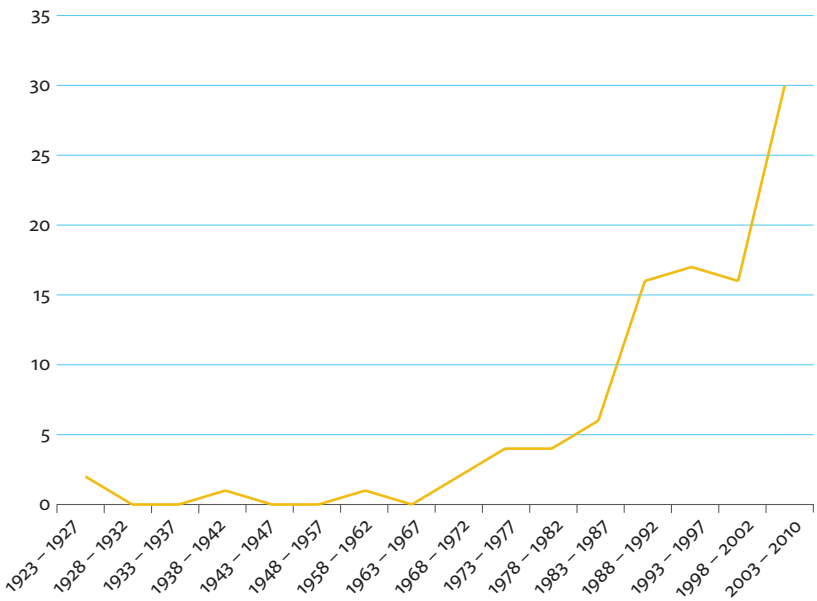

Figure 2. Average # of articles with *chutzpah* per year in JTA corpus.

are available online in a searchable format. Like other eastern and midwestern cities, Pittsburgh was a destination for thousands of Jewish immigrants, mostly from Russia and Poland, around the turn of the 20th century, in addition to a sizeable German-Jewish population that had arrived a few decades earlier (Taylor 1943).

As Figure 3 indicates, the incidence of *shul* increased significantly in the 1980s, like in the JTA corpus. At the same time, we also see a difference: *shul* was used more in the earlier decades in the Pittsburgh corpus than in the JTA corpus. (The search function in the Pittsburgh Jewish newspaper corpus yields results per issue rather than per article, so an analysis of *shul* as a percentage of *synagogue*, etc., is not feasible, and the percentages in Figure 1 and Figure 3 are not directly comparable.) Several of the tokens of *shul* in the Pittsburgh data are from quoted speech within articles, reminding us that the word *shul* was not completely absent from American Jewish speech in the 1920s through 1980s. Perhaps it was seen as part of a more informal register, less appropriate for print journalism than for spoken conversations. In addition, because Pittsburgh has a sizeable Orthodox population (12.6% of 45,000 Jews total, according to Schoor 1984), it is possible that the use of *shul* was greater there than it was in cities with smaller Orthodox populations. Some of the uses of *shul* do refer to Orthodox congregations, such as a 1949 use of *shul* referring to the Orthodox Shaare Torah.

To sum up the corpus study, it is clear that the use of *shul* and a few other Yiddish words increased significantly in the Jewish American press – both on national and local levels – in the 1980s and 1990s. This is especially true for Yiddish words in the religious domain (*shul*, *daven*) but we also see this trend in the non-religious word

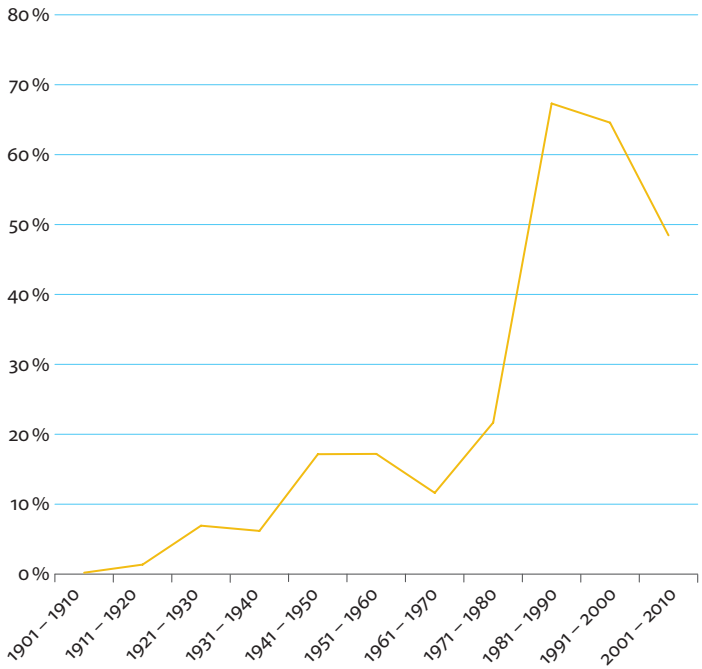

Figure 3. % of issues per year with the word *shul* in the Pittsburgh corpus.

chutzpah. As the next section explains, it is not just the mainstream Jewish press that features an increase in Yiddish words; it is also cultural venues geared toward young Jewish adults.

2.3 Media geared toward young Jewish adults

In 2010, a few Jews in their 20s and 30s created a website geared toward new parents. It included information on Jewish birth ceremonies, Jewish baby names, family-oriented Jewish traditions, and raising children in interfaith families. They considered several names for the website – and even consulted with me as a linguist with expertise about Jewish English. They wanted something that was recognizably Jewish but would not scare off people with little Jewish education. Ultimately they settled on a name that includes a Yiddish word: "Kveller.com: A Jewish Twist on Parenting." Why would a site geared toward young Jewish parents highlight a Yiddish word, *kvell* ('feel or express pride'), which is associated with grandparents pinching their grandchildren's cheeks? I would argue that the reason is the recent change in the social meaning of many Yiddish loanwords: they have acquired associations with young, hip, ironic, urban Jewishness, a quality sometimes lightheartedly referred to as "Heebster," a combination of "Heeb" and "hipster."

We see this trend in several Heebster-oriented cultural venues (see discussion in Benor 2012b, from which parts of the following discussion have been adapted). The original Heebster organ, Heeb Magazine, published from 2002–2010 and now available online, included several sections with Yiddish names: "The Whole *Megillah*" ('long, engrossing story or description,' lit. 'scroll'), "*Nosh* Pit" ('snack,' based on "mosh pit," a section about food), and "Urban *Kvetch*" ('complaint,' likely based on the New York delivery service "UrbanFetch"). One image, from an article about the need for a Jewish Disney princess, not only uses a Yiddish phrase ("oy vey" – 'oh no') but also presents it in faux-Hebrew lettering (Figure 4). As Shandler explains, the rendering of English letters in a form that looks like Hebrew letters "marks the words as distinctively Jewish while integrating them into a more widely familiar communicative code. The use of these fonts thus resembles 'kosher-style' cuisine, preserving manner while altering, even subverting, substance" (Shandler 2006: 156).

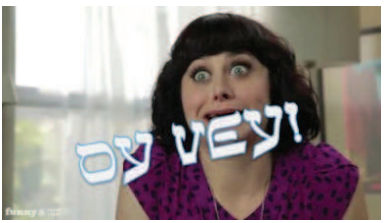

Figure 4. Image from Heeb Magazine (http://heebmagazine.com/disneys-next-princess-whens-our-turn/39117).

Another example of Heebster Yiddish comes from the 2003 movie *The Hebrew Hammer*, a satire of "blaxploitation" films. The young Jewish characters use Yiddish loanwords like *shlep* ('carry') and *bubbele* ('sweetie') and Yiddish-influenced constructions like "eat by us," "you may have what to brag about," and "you want I should talk dirty to you?" They also tap into the association between Jews and the [x] sound, using [x] in place of /h/, /k/, and /r/: "The 'xood," "Xebrew," "Xadillac," and "xemove" (remove). By using exaggerated Yiddishisms, this film offers a satirical, entertaining take on American Jewish culture, directed especially toward young, urban Jews with Yiddish-speaking ancestry.

We see a similar (over)use of Yiddish-influenced English in Lisa Alcalay Klug's 2008 *Cool Jew: The Ultimate Guide for Every Member of the Tribe*. This humorous book presents Jewish ethnicity, culture, and religion as cool by combining informative text with top ten lists, diagrams, and hip hop imagery. *Cool Jew* includes Yiddish loanwords from the religious domain, such as *shul*, *frum* ('religious'), and *shlogn kapores* ('expiation of sins through swinging chickens over one's head'), as well as loanwords outside of the religious domain, such as *gornisht* ('nothing'), *shmear* ('spread'), and *yiddishe kopf* ('Jewish head'). This book even features a chapter titled "Heebster Spoken Here" and a recurring sidebar called "FYI: For the Yiddish Impaired."

Even though materials like these are produced by and for young Jews, their creators also recognize the ideological connection between Yiddish and grandparents. One organization taps into this connection to convince young Jews to call their "bubbes" ('grandmas') and "zeydes" ('grandpas') in swing states like Florida and Ohio and convince them to vote for Democrats in presidential elections. The organization now known as the Jewish Council for Education and Research publicized these efforts in the 2004, 2008, and 2012 elections using different names: "Operation *Bubbe*," "The Great *Schlep*" ('long journey'), and "Call Your *Zeyde*." All three of these Internet-based campaigns used Yiddish words, not only in their titles but also in their publicity materials. The most recent one, a video parody of Carly Rae Jepsen's "Call Me Maybe," portrayed a young woman calling her bubbe and zeyde and convincing them to vote for Barack Obama, using several Yiddish words. The young woman says, "So *nu* ('so?'), how's West Palm Beach?" Her bubbe says "*keppie*" ('head') and "Why don't you be a *mensch* ('good person') and vote Obama?" Her zeyde has a Yiddish accent ("vell, vell") and says, "*sheyna punim*" ('pretty face'), "*shanda*" ('scandal'), and "The president does have a *heimishe neshama*" ('warm, familiar soul'). Clearly the creators of this video understand that members of their target audience, young Jewish adults, associate Yiddish words and pronunciations with their grandparents. But they also recognize the infusion of these words in Jewish youth culture.

This brief description of the use of Yiddish loanwords in media geared toward young Jewish adults parallels the findings from the survey and corpus studies. Although Yiddish is associated with elderly Jews, it has also come to be associated with "cool Jews" in their 20s and 30s. "Heebster" culture uses select Yiddish loanwords for ironic and comic effect, drawing from both the religious and secular spheres and showing young Jews' ambivalent orientation toward their Jewish roots and the communal structures that engage their parents (see Cohen and Kelman 2005 on irony in Jewish youth events). In other words, postvernacular Yiddish indexes not only nostalgia and connection to the immigrant generation but also a young Jewish hipness.

3. Discussion and conclusion

The data presented in this paper point to dual trends in the use of a Germanic language in America, a century after this language was introduced to this country on a large scale. Vernacular Yiddish is in decline, and postvernacular Yiddish is on the rise. While some Yiddish loanwords are used mostly by older Jews, others are used more by younger Jews. The trend we might expect several generations after the mass wave of Yiddish-speaking immigration – decline in Yiddish-influenced English – is taking place with some loanwords. But the opposite trend is taking place with others, especially words in the religious domain and an ironic use of others.

This can be seen as an example of the boomerang effect in ethnic language use, in which descendants of people who shifted away from a language come to embrace

elements of it. Why are the great-grandchildren of immigrants embracing their ancestral language, albeit in postvernacular ways? There are a few factors. First, Jews today feel increasingly comfortable displaying their distinctness in full view of their non-Jewish neighbors, colleagues, friends, and spouses. This was not the case in the mid-20th century, when the children of immigrants worked hard to distance themselves from their parents' embarrassing accents and other cultural practices. The trend toward ethnic pride and multiculturalism that began in late-1960s America had a large impact on Jews' pride in their distinctness. In addition, this can be seen as an instance of Hansen's (1938) theory of the "third-generation return": "What the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember." Although some scholars have criticized this theory as not being supported by data (e.g., Gans 1979, Lyman 1995, Kaufman 2012), it seems to be valid in this and other cases of the boomerang effect. Of course the grandchildren do not fully reclaim the language and culture of their (immigrant) grandparents. The postvernacular nature of this "return" is akin to Gans's (1979) notion of "symbolic ethnicity." Even so, it is clear from the data presented in this paper that Hansen's theory points to something real: some young Jews today are expressing interest in elements of Yiddish culture that their parents and grandparents eschewed.

Another factor in the contemporary interest in Yiddish and use of Yiddish loanwords is the expanding "salad bar" of Jewish expression (Horowitz 2003): Jews today have an increasing array of options for religious, cultural, political, and social engagement with other Jews. Postvernacular Yiddish is just one of these options; others include synagogue attendance, advocacy work for Israel or for economic justice in American cities, the local food movement, and Ladino folk music. Different Jews embrace different options, and some participate in multiple ones. Engagement with Yiddish allows some young Jews to align themselves with certain individuals and to distinguish themselves from others.

Also contributing to the increase in Yiddish loanwords is the renaissance in Jewish religious observance. While many young Jews today (especially children of mixed marriages) are distancing themselves from the religiosity of their ancestors, some are (re-)embracing it, voluntarily taking on the strictures of Orthodox religious observance. Partly because vernacular Yiddish is still used in some Orthodox communities, the ideological connection between Yiddish words and Orthodoxy remains strong. When Jews embrace Orthodoxy they also adopt many of the Yiddish-origin features Orthodox Jews commonly use within English (Benor 2012a). Some of these features spread to non-Orthodox communities through overlapping social networks. We might hypothesize the spread of Yiddish-origin features in the religious domain as follows: Yiddish-speaking Haredi Jews interact with Haredi Jews who do not speak Yiddish, who interact with Modern Orthodox Jews, who interact with non-Orthodox Jews. Through these interactions, Yiddish words and constructions spread, as less religious Jews look to more religious Jews as a model to emulate.

Note that this paper focuses on loanword use among American Jews, of which only about 10% are Orthodox (although this percentage is growing due to high birth

rates). The survey respondents did include Orthodox Jews, and the Jewish press analyzed reaches a partly Orthodox audience. Even so, an analysis focusing only on Orthodox groups would find much more Yiddish influence, as well as an increasing use of specific features, like "staying by us" (Benor 2012a).

While the data presented here are about Yiddish, and some of the details are unique to Jews as an ethno-religious community, much of the analysis is applicable to other ethnic groups in America, including those that speak other Germanic languages. The current historical moment in the United States is conducive to the symbolic return to the language of one's ancestors, whether they assimilated to English following immigration or colonial conquest. In contrast to the first half of the twentieth century, many people today express personal connection to their ethnic distinctiveness and its linguistic manifestation. Shandler's (2006) notion of postvernacularity sheds light on how people relate to a minority language when a large percentage of its speakers have shifted to the dominant language. The methods used in this study to investigate the trajectories of postvernacular Yiddish – survey, corpus study, and cultural analysis – might be useful in research on other languages and groups. The boomerang effect certainly does not apply in every situation of language shift. But in some cases, focusing on the curvilinear pattern of language use gives us a better understanding of the connection between language and ethnic identity.

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