Dear Survey Takers,

We want to thank you all for participating in the survey and for helping us circulate it. Within three weeks of starting the survey (7/7/08), we had over 40,000 responses. We began analyzing the data in early August, but we do still expect to incorporate future responses.

Based on the comments people left at the end of the survey, we decided to post a list of Frequently Asked Questions. Thank you again for participating in this survey, and we look forward to seeing and sharing the results.

Sincerely,
Prof. Sarah Bunin Benor
Prof. Steven M. Cohen
Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

Q: Who are you, and why are you doing this survey?
A: We are both professors at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion. Steven M. Cohen is a sociologist of American Jewry, and Sarah Bunin Benor is a sociolinguist who specializes in Jewish language. You can see our faculty webpages and more details about the survey here: http://www.huc.edu/news/08/7/language/

Q: Where did you get your funding?
A: We do not have funding for this study. It is part of our regular faculty research.

Q: Why didn’t you include English and other major immigrant languages in the list of ancestral languages?
A: Of course we realize that many immigrants to the US and Canada spoke English (as well as Italian, Mandarin, Japanese, Hindi, Fante, Khmer, Yoruba, etc.). And of course we realize that not all North Americans are descended from immigrants. For coding purposes we only needed to know whether respondents’ ancestors spoke languages related to the linguistic features we are investigating. We’re glad you were able to make use of the Other category to note ancestral languages that are not on the list we provided.

Q: Why was the survey so New York-centric? There are Jews in other parts of the country.
A: According to previous research, some Jews in the Midwest and elsewhere have some New York regional features in their speech. We want to find out how extensive this phenomenon is and how it relates to their familial ties to New York.
Q: Will you keep my e-mail address confidential?
A: Absolutely. We are the only ones who will see your e-mail address, and we will keep it separate from the data. We will only e-mail you according to your requests (as you noted on the survey’s last page) to learn about the results or to be contacted for further questions (or both).

Q: Why didn’t you include my religious group?
A: We didn’t think everyone would want to look through a list of over 3 dozen religious groups. We’re glad you were able to make use of the Other category.

Q: Why would my non-Jewish friends be interested in taking the survey? It includes so many questions about Jewish observance and background.
A: Those who identify themselves as Jews get a longer version of the survey. We didn’t think non-Jews would want to answer questions about Hebrew school, Sabbath observance, and how they pronounce Sukkot/Sukkos.

Q: I got this survey invitation from 4 people. Obviously, you don’t have a random sample. How can you make any claims?
A: We are certainly aware of the limitations of the snowball “sampling” technique, and we plan to discuss this in detail in our write-ups. We do not plan to make any grand claims about “all Jews” or “all North Americans,” only about correlations among subgroups.

Q: Why didn’t you ask about shlep, tshatshke, goyim, shiksa, putz, shmuck, shtup, shmegege, lox, blintzes, etc.?
A: We didn’t think everyone would want to spend 2 hours taking a survey…

Q: Why didn’t you ask about whether I use these words seriously or comically, whether I translate them when I use them, or which types of Jews/non-Jews I use them with?
A: We didn’t think everyone would want to spend 2 hours taking a survey…

Q: Why didn’t you include words from other Jewish communities, like Yemenites, Persians, Karaites, Romaniyotes, Beta Israel, etc.?
A: We didn’t think everyone would want to spend 2 hours taking a survey…

Q: I am a cantor / rabbinical student / very engaged Jewish lay leader / degree holder in Jewish education / etc. Why didn’t you ask about that?
A: We didn’t think everyone would want to spend 2 hours taking a survey…

Q: Why did you include Arabic words like yallah and ahalan?
A: Because they’re part of Israeli Hebrew and are used by some American Jews who have significant ties to Israel.

Q: When will the results be ready? Where do you plan to publish them?
A: We hope to have a general write-up ready within a few months, and we plan to submit articles on various parts of the survey to a few linguistics and Jewish studies journals.
Q: Why didn’t you respond to the comment I wrote at the end of the survey?
A: We have looked through all 5000 comments, but we do not have time to address them all.

Q: I just spent 15 minutes telling you whether I know Yiddish and Hebrew words. Now can you please tell me what they all mean?
A: Sure, here’s a glossary:

Key to languages of origin that Jews have had contact with (note that some of the Yiddish words derive from Germanic, Slavic, and Romance languages):

Yid = Yiddish (language of Eastern European Jews)
Heb = Hebrew (either textual Hebrew or Modern Israeli Hebrew or both)
Aram = (Judeo-)Aramaic, especially of the Talmud
Lad = Ladino / Judeo-Spanish / Judezmo (from the Ottoman Empire)
J-Arab = Judeo-Arabic (from Arabic-speaking countries)

Words:
maven (Yid, Heb): expert, whiz
mazel tov (Yid, Heb): congratulations
shpiel (Yid): (lengthy) speech or pitch
klutz (Yid): clumsy person
kvetch (Yid): complain
macher (Yid): important person, big-shot, mover and shaker
naches (Yid, Heb): pride and joy
shmutz (Yid): dirt
heimish (Yid): homey, cozy, relaxed
mensch (Yid): good person
bashert (Yid): predestined match
keppie (Yid, Eng): head (in affectionate speech, usually directed to child)
nu? (Yid, Heb): well? (expresses impatience)
balagan (Yid, Heb): mess, bedlam
tachlis (Yid, Heb): practical details, serious business, bottom line
yofi (Heb): nice
yalla (Heb): come on, let’s go (originally from Arabic)
ahalan (Heb): hi (originally from Arabic)
takeh (Yid): really
bar minan (J-Arab, Heb): God forbid; (Aram, Yid): corpse
chas v’shalom (Yid, Heb): God forbid
davka (Yid, Heb, Aram): specifically

These words were included in the part of the questionnaire given to those who identify themselves as Jewish:
goyish (Yid): associated with non-Jews, WASP-y (considered offensive by some)
leyn (Yid): read Torah
daven (Yid): pray
drash (Heb): interpretation of a biblical text, sermon
bentsh (Yid): bless, say Grace After Meals
yahrtzeit (Yid): anniversary of a death
meldado (Lad): anniversary of a death (from ‘reading’, as relatives commemorate the deceased by studying traditional texts)
moadim l’simcha (Heb): greeting used during intermediate days of a long festival (lit. ‘occasions for joy’)
kal vachomer (Heb): all the more
lav davka (Aram): not necessarily
l’chatchila (Aram): initially, before the fact
hameyvin yavin (Heb): those “in the know” will understand

Thank you again for your interest in the survey.