Lectures of Interest to Jewish Groups
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Dr. Benor has presented interactive, engaging lectures to synagogues and other Jewish groups for over a decade. The lectures below can be offered individually or in sequences of three or more as part of a scholar-in-residence weekend. All talks draw from Dr. Benor’s academic research and are presented in ways that are accessible and interesting to the general public.

Mensch, Bentsh, and Balagan: Language as a Marker of Jewish Identity
This talk describes the range of Jewish American English – from the addition of a few Yiddish words among Jews with weak connections to organized Jewish life to the “Yeshivish” of strictly Orthodox Jews, which is filled with words from Yiddish, Hebrew, and Aramaic and Yiddish influences in grammar and pronunciation. Jews of various stripes use subtle variation in language to signal their textual knowledge, religious denomination, generation from immigration, ancestral origin, and orientation toward Israel. In short, “Jewish language” serves not only to distinguish Jews from non-Jews but also to distinguish Jews from Jews.

Matisyahu’s Beard and Miriam’s Skirts: What People Change When They Become Orthodox
There is more to becoming Orthodox than observing religious laws. Newly Orthodox Jews, or ba’alei teshuva (lit. ‘those who return’), encounter a very different culture, including new ways of talking, dressing, and acting. Focusing on the Yiddish and Hebrew words used by English-speaking Orthodox Jews, this lecture explores how “BTs” integrate into the community partly by taking on these new practices. It includes brief readings from Benor’s book Becoming Frum: How Newcomers Learn the Language and Culture of Orthodox Judaism.

Chutzpah to Chidush: A Century of Yiddish-Influenced English in America (especially popular among older crowds)
In this talk, Dr. Benor shows how Yiddish has influenced the English of Jews (and non-Jews) in the U.S. In addition to words like “shlep,” “klutz,” and “maven,” Yiddish also affects English grammar and phrases like “be well” and “enough already.” Yiddish has an impact both on the “Yinglish” of the Ashkenazic immigrant generation and on the “Yeshivish” English spoken by Orthodox Jews today. An analysis of songs by Mickey Katz and contemporary Orthodox bands demonstrates how Yiddish has had similar but different influences in various spheres of American Jewish life.

Yiddish, Ladino, and Jewish English: Do American Jews Speak a Jewish Language?
This talk looks at several features common among Jewish languages of the past and discusses whether American Jews use them. From the tradition of translating biblical and rabbinic texts to the incorporation of Hebrew words, most of these features are common among religiously engaged American Jews. A major exception is the use of Hebrew letters to write the vernacular. Through analysis of language, we can gain a better understanding of contemporary American Jews and how they compare to Jewish communities of the past.

What’s on your iPad? Trends in American Jewish Identity and Community
Using changes in the music industry as a metaphor for Jewish identity, this interactive session explores how American Jews understand their Jewishness and how younger Jews differ from
previous generations. It focuses on the diversity of approaches to Jewishness, the explosion of Jewish communal and cultural options, and the quest for personal meaning.

**Jewishness in America: Religion or Ethnicity?**

While many non-Jews consider Jews to be solely a religious group, Jews tend to consider themselves both a religious group and an ethnic/cultural group. In this talk, Dr. Benor explains how religion and ethnicity intersect in American Jews’ opinions, behaviors, and cultural products. Although some elements of Jewish ethnic identity have recently declined, such as commitment to having Jewish friends and marrying Jews, other elements of ethnic identity are increasing, such as interest in Jewish music, films, and political organizations.

**Jewish Languages Around the World**

An interactive lecture about how Jews have distinguished themselves linguistically from their non-Jewish neighbors throughout the history of the Diaspora. As Jews migrated around the world, they picked up local non-Jewish languages and made them distinctly Jewish by incorporating elements from Hebrew, Aramaic, and other languages. Through samples of Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Arabic, and Judeo-Italian, this talk shows how Jews have used language as a prime means for expressing their identities as both Jews and local residents.

**Frum Unity, Frum Diversity: The Orthodox Continuum in Popular Culture**

American Orthodox Jews exhibit a continuum of religiosity and insularity, ranging from liberal Modern Orthodox to stringent Haredi or Black Hat Orthodox. This talk shows how Orthodox Jews discuss that continuum in songs and YouTube videos created by and for Orthodox Jews, as well as on internet dating sites, like frumster.com.

**Mameloshn (Mother-Tongue): An Introduction to Yiddish Language and Culture**

This introduction to Yiddish is tailored to your organization’s needs and can include a few of the following components: a history of the language, basic conversation, some Yiddish songs, a reading lesson for people who can read Hebrew, information on the current state of Yiddish, and Benor’s mini-translation of *My Fair Lady*, focusing on the Litvaks and the Galitiansers.

**Az di tate-mame zoln nisht farshteyn: Speak Yiddish So Your Parents Won’t Understand!**

This one-time class, geared toward pre-teens and teens, gives a glimpse into the exciting language and culture of Ashkenazic Jews. You know more Yiddish than you think! Yiddish words like “klutz,” “pastrami,” and “shmooze” have made their way into general American English. But Yiddish has also influenced our use of Hebrew words for specifically Jewish things, like “tallis,” “kiddush,” and “bar mitzvah.” And many Ashkenazi family names are based on Yiddish words, such as “Goldman,” “Steinberg,” “Katz,” and “Abramson.” After this fun session, you will be able to speak a bit of the language that your great-grandparents may have spoken when they didn’t want their kids to understand.

**Di Goyim, Loz Vedres, and The Gentiles: Referring to Non-Jews in Yiddish, Ladino, and English**

Throughout history, Jews have referred to the non-Jews around them in various ways, simultaneously aligning themselves with and distinguishing themselves from non-Jews. They have used Hebrew words (such as *arel* – un-circumcised one), humorous concepts (such as *kratsmach* – used in Jewish English for ‘Christmas’ – from Yiddish ‘scratch me’), and derogatory language (such as *la zona* – Ladino ‘the prostitute’ for Mary). By looking at two Jewish languages that thrived in the recent past, as well as the Jewish English spoken in our communities today, this talk shows how the words we use both reflect and contribute to our identity as Jews in a non-Jewish world.