

THE JEWISH LANGUAGES

An analysis of the current Jewish languages:
past and present

Research project

School year 2017 – 2018

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	2
2 JUDEO-SPANISH	3
2.1 History of the Sephardi Jews	3
2.2 History of Judeo-Spanish	6
2.2.1 Dialects of Judeo-Spanish	7
2.3 Features of the language	9
3 YIDDISH	11
3.1 History of Yiddish and the Ashkenazi Jews	11
3.1.1 19th and 20th century	13
3.1.2 Historical use of Yiddish	13
3.1.3 Dialects of Yiddish	14
3.2. Yiddish and Hasidic Jews.....	15
3.3 Features of the language	16
4 HEBREW	19
4.1 History of Hebrew.....	19
4.1.1 Historical stages of Hebrew	19
4.1.2 History of Modern Hebrew	20
4.2 Features of the contemporary language.....	23
5 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT-DAY STATUS OF THE JEWISH LANGUAGES	26
5.1 Survey	26
5.1.1 Questions	26
5.1.2 Answers.....	29
5.2 Conclusions.....	48
6 BIBLIOGRAPHY	51

1 INTRODUCTION

My research project is about the Jewish languages or, more specifically, about the current Jewish languages that are spoken today: Judeo-Spanish, Yiddish and Hebrew. Considering this, I should also destine my attention to Judeo-Arabic, which is another Jewish language still alive today spoken by Mizrahi Jews. However, due to the difficulty of being able to investigate such a distant language, both culturally and geographically, my decision has been to leave apart the subject of Judeo-Arabic and focus on these other three languages, the three of them being more easily approached to.¹ I have decided to tackle this topic because languages -especially minority ones- have always fascinated me and, besides, Jewish languages are already curious enough by themselves. For example, the fact that Hebrew has been the only language ever to have been revived successfully makes it exceptionally interesting and intriguing.

For my project I have used three different methods: bibliography (books and webpages), interviews and a survey. The first three parts on Judeo-Spanish, Yiddish and Hebrew were based almost totally on bibliography and the last part on the current status of the previously analyzed languages, on a survey I made. Alongside this, I interviewed three experts on this topic: Borja Vilallonga (historian and journalist), Arnau Pons (Hebrew translator, among other jobs) and Joan Ferrer (Hebrew and Aramaic professor). These people helped me orientate myself in this unknown –up to now, I hope– world, suggested me books I could check and gave me other contacts that at the same time provided me with more useful bibliography. People from *el Call* in Girona also guided me at first and afterwards contributed with me on getting answers for my survey, but I will get to this later on.

¹ To illustrate my arguments, one only needs to compare the low presence of Judeo-Arabic speakers (5) in comparison to that of Yiddish (83), Hebrew (41) and Judeo-Spanish (20) speakers in my survey's answers, of which I will later on talk about.

2 JUDEO-SPANISH

Judeo-Spanish, or simply known as *Ladino* or *Judesmo*, is the Romance language that was and still is spoken to a certain degree by the Sephardi (or Sephardic) Jews, also called Sephardim². These are the Spanish Jews that in 1492 were expelled from the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon by the Catholic Monarchs, who ruled at the time. Due to this, they spread across much of Europe and even the North of Africa and the Middle East, where some still live at today's date.

2.1 History of the Sephardi Jews

The denomination of *Sephardi* derives from the word the Jews of the time used when referring to the Iberian Peninsula: *Sepharad* (סְפָרַד in Hebrew). As the name itself states and as I mentioned before, Sepharad was their country of origin and, after they were expelled, their long-lost homeland.

The history of this people starts way back when the first Hebrews arrived at the Iberian Peninsula. Many legends concerning their arrival flourished during the 10th century Al-Andalus as a means to explain and justify the splendid days these Jews were living at that time. Nevertheless, there are few reliable historical facts that can give enough proof as to when exactly this fact took place. We can only imagine that some started settling in Mediterranean commercial cities and that, later on, following the Second Temple of Jerusalem's destruction in the 1st century B.C., refugees come to the peninsula. What we can claim is that, by the 4th century, there was already a high number of Jews living together with the local Christians.

This religious coexistence worsened as time passed. The various Councils of Toledo established laws against the Jewish people, at first merely banning them certain social possibilities (such as work or marriage opportunities), but finally getting to the point of forcing them to either convert to Christianity or to leave the kingdom. It was as a result of this that the Sephardic Jews welcomed the Muslims after they invaded the Christian kingdoms. These, instead, tolerated their beliefs and traditions and even gave them the rule over some cities. Thanks to this, the Jewish people acquired an important role in sciences, literature and politics. Even during the time of the Taifa Kingdoms they kept this high status and it was not until the arrival of the Almoravids

² The plural word Sephardim, as well as Ashkenazim, Mizrahim, Hasidim and many other Jewish denominations, derives from the *-m* suffix used in Hebrew to mark the plural form of a noun.

in the 11th century and the Almohads later on that this changed. They were not welcome any more as they had once been and for that a vast amount of Jews left for the Christian kingdoms.

At first, they received civil rights and privileges from the Spanish, Aragonese and Catalan authorities, such as from counts and kings. Moreover, a cultural interfaith flourishing was born and developed during the 13th century, during which time many translations

from Arabic classical texts to Latin and Romance were made. Nevertheless, little by little the social and political hostility towards Judaism increased, getting to the point of numerous slaughters taking place. As a result of this, the Spanish Jewry was deeply affected.



Illustration 1: Migrations and settlements of the Spanish Jews; source: <https://es.pinterest.com/>

When *Isabel I de Castilla* and *Fernando II de Aragón* arrived at the throne, they protected the Jews under the title of “royal property”. Considering this, one wouldn’t expect that during their reign, in 1492, they would banish every single Jew who didn’t convert to Christianity from their kingdoms. The exact number of people that were expelled has long been discussed but around one hundred thousand is a relatively agreed on number. So, this approximately one hundred thousand Jews fled to other countries such as Portugal, France, Italy, the North of Africa, the Netherlands and especially to the welcoming Ottoman Empire, as can be seen in the picture above.

That way, Sephardic communities arose in each city where they settled. Depending on the region, three major groups of communities were born in the 16th century:

- The *Western* communities: the majority of their members were the *conversos*, the converts, who, after their expulsion from Spain and their

forced conversion in Portugal, didn't leave their Jewish beliefs and customs despite being Catholics by name. These false converts, having been established safely in commercial cities in France and Northern Europe (basically the Netherlands, England and Germany), came back to their original faith openly. From there, some left to the new Dutch and English colonies in America. Moreover, some groups of Jews, those who hadn't been converts, went to live in Italian and Southeastern French cities. Especially in Amsterdam and Rotterdam the Jewish press published many works in Hebrew, Portuguese (or Judeo-Portuguese), Yiddish and Spanish (or Judeo-Spanish). This way, the language that the Sephardi Jews spoke acquired social importance.

- The *Ottoman Empire's* communities: at that time the Muslims tolerated all religious minorities and for this reason many Spanish Jews started establishing their new life in places under Turkish rule (the Middle East, the North of Africa, the Balkan countries...). Their decent conditions of life allowed the Jews to develop a Sephardi culture being in the exile. They lived together with other religions and even with other Jewish ethnic groups, from whom they could be distinguished by their own language and their Spanish tradition. Some of the most significant and influential communities were located in cities such as Constantinople and Safed, where books in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Ladino were published.
- The *Moroccan* communities: Morocco was the only North African country which didn't belong to the Ottoman Empire and before 1492 there were already some Sephardi communities that had originated from Spanish refugees fleeing from persecutions. Then, some of the expelled in 1492 from Castile and Aragon and, later on, some of the converts from Portugal crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and stayed there. As the years passed a new variety of Judeo-Spanish was born: *Haketia*, also called Western Judeo-Spanish. Unfortunately, little by little the local Jews became an oppressed minority. Subsequently, they became poor communities that lost their identity when the European colonists arrived. Therefore, many left during the 19th century to other North African, European and South American countries.

These traditional communities lasted approximately until the 19th and 20th century due to political, cultural and economic changes that were taking place in their countries. Many Jews abandoned their traditional lifestyle and many also migrated to North and South America and to Western Europe. After that, in Greece and the Balkans during the Second World War, those who weren't exterminated were banished from their homelands. Therefore, following the almost total disappearance of the Sephardic communities that these Jews had once formed, their language, Judeo-Spanish, and their literature was deeply affected.

In Morocco, the Jews that hadn't already left during the 19th century ended up leaving after the 1956 independence of their country. Many now still live in Spain, Israel, France and some North and South American countries.

Finally, many of the last Jews that had survived and still lived in the Balkans and Turkey migrated mostly to Israel. These Sephardim lost their identity while integrating themselves in other Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

Nowadays, there are very few and poor Sephardic communities left in traditional cities such as Istanbul, Sofia and Belgrade.

2.2 History of Judeo-Spanish

The Spanish Jews, before being exiled from the Iberian Peninsula, spoke the Romance languages of their region: Catalan, Portuguese or Spanish, with very slight differences in relation to the non-Jewish speakers of these languages. Once they were expelled they continued speaking them in the countries in which they settled. There they were mixed up and consequently had to come up with a standard language in order to understand each other, which was mostly based on the contemporary Spanish dialect. From that moment on we can name it *Judeo-Spanish*, despite knowing that its speakers did not call it likewise, but simply *español* (or *Haketia* in Morocco, as I mentioned before). From then onwards it developed as any other language would, separated from the Spanish used in the Peninsula. For this reason, the current Judeo-Spanish is not a mere fossil of the 15th century peninsular Spanish, it evolved and transformed as it naturally should have.

During approximately the next two centuries after the expulsion from Portugal, Castile, Aragon and Navarre, there was a high level of intercommunication between most of the Sephardic communities around Europe and even with the peninsula

through the converts, which allowed, together with the published works printed in cities with relevant Jewish communities such as Constantinople and Salonica, the formation of a kind of *koiné*, a standard language (as I said before) that all Sephardim could understand. This tongue, very similar to the one spoken in *Castilla la Nueva* and *Andalucía* acquired such prestige that not only the Catalan and Portuguese-speaking Jews, but also the Italki, Ashkenazi and Romaniote Jews that lived near significant Sephardi communities, who spoke Judeo-Italian, Judeo-Greek and Yiddish respectively, abandoned their own language and started speaking Judeo-Spanish. This feature distinguished them from the other communities: either the Christians, the Muslims, other ethnic Jews... Their language gave them their identity.

However, as time passed, this advantageous situation for Judeo-Spanish expired as the connection with the peninsula and between Sephardi communities was lost. Other languages like Italian, Dutch, Arabic and Greek won the battle against it due to social, political and cultural reasons. This happened in the European countries the Sephardim were living, nevertheless, in Morocco and the Ottoman Empire the Sephardi communities continued to flourish and to speak the language of their country of origin. As a result of this isolation of the Jewish communities, two major dialects of Judeo-Spanish started appearing, of which I will now speak briefly.

2.2.1 Dialects of Judeo-Spanish

The two main dialects that arose were:

- *Western Judeo-Spanish*: it was situated basically in Turkey, the Balkans and the Middle East. Various dialects developed there and the most prestigious were those used in cities with a notable importance in culture and the Jewish press such as Salonica and Istanbul.
- *Haketia*: it was spoken in Morocco and was influenced to some extent by Arabic. The future that awaited the Haketia was, unfortunately, quite dark. In Morocco the isolation of the Sephardi communities was not present to a full extent because of the colonial interests that Spain had in the North of Africa. The continual contact that the Moroccan Jews had with the Spanish colonists caused the linguistic approach of Haketia to Iberian Spanish, eliminating many of its characteristic features. This has taken place throughout the last centuries and hasn't stopped yet due to the constant

arrival of Spanish settlers and servicemen during the last six or seven decades. In this way, the language spoken by the last few remaining Moroccan Jews can barely be distinguished from the Spanish of the peninsula, more specifically, from the Andalusian dialect.

2.3 Features of the language

As I mentioned before, Judeo-Spanish can sometimes be mistakenly treated as a sheer fossil of medieval Spanish. It is true that the bases of Judeo-Spanish lie on Castilian medieval Spanish, nonetheless, it evolved independently once the Sephardim were expelled. The lexicon, the grammar, the syntax, the phonetics... all of these changed due, partly, to external linguistic influences. It must also be considered that both of the dialects developed in some ways differently, and in others, closely. Here some of the most significant components of both are presented:

- Some archaic features that are no longer present in Spanish have been conserved. In Western Judeo-Spanish this can especially be seen in what concerns the phonetic vowel system, which is much like that of the old Spanish. This is, in fact, what mostly gives the idea that Ladino is just “plain old Spanish”.
- Appearance of other specific features, predominantly in Western Judeo-Spanish.
- Some non-Spanish elements (Catalan, Aragonese, Portuguese...) are also present due to the multiple origins of the Jews. Particularly the role of the numerous Portuguese converts that became part of the Sephardic communities granted a special relevance to the influence of Portuguese.
- Entry of non-Hispanic vocabulary from:
 1. *Arabic* (the Arabic loans already existed in the 1492 Spanish but the Jews conserved them with a more similar form to the original Arabic, because of its proximity to Biblical Hebrew, being both Semitic languages) in Judeo-Spanish but more in Haketia because of the loans it received once it had contact with Moroccan Arabic.
 2. *Hebrew* and *Aramaic*, being the liturgical languages of Judaism.

3. *Turkish* and the *Balkan languages* (Greek, Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian....) in Western Judeo-Spanish due to a constant linguistic interchange as a result of commercial, social and administrative relations between the Jewish communities and the neighboring Muslims and/or Christians.
- *Italian*, through the commercial and cultural connections the Sephardi Ottoman Empire's communities had early had with Italy and some other European countries, to be precise, since the 16th century.
 - Haketia phonetically evolved more compared to Western Judeo-Spanish and is therefore more similar to the 21st century Spanish.
 - Since the mid-19th century and until the present day, more Western European languages such as Italian, German, French and Spanish influenced both varieties of Judesmo because of the importance these languages had in various institutions related to culture, politics and education, located in the countries where the Sephardi Jews lived. The case of Morocco was the most extreme: as I mentioned before, Spanish (and French) had a tremendous impact on Haketia, since France and Spain had colonial interests in that area, to the point of eliminating most of the characteristic features of the local dialect by Hispanicizing it.

Thanks to the similarity of Judeo-Spanish with Spanish, Judeo-Spanish can be fairly well understood by any Spanish speaker. Below I include a translated fragment from Yiddish to Ladino by Arnau Pons, to whom I have referred previously as one of my interviewees. It is extracted from the translation of a song in Yiddish³ by Itzhak Katzenelson called "The song of the murdered Jewish people", "דאס ליד פונעם אויסגעהרגעטן יידישן פאלק" (or "*Dos lid funem oysgeharętn Yidishn folk*" in the Latin alphabet) in the original version.

Izak Katsenelson, *El kante del puevlo djidyó atemado* (**FRAGMENTOS**)

Primer Kante: **Kanta!**

1.

«Kanta! Toma en la mano tu arpa, gueka, aguekada, livyana,

³ For more information on Yiddish see the *Yiddish* part from page 10 onwards.

echa sobre las kuedras finas los tus dedos pezgados
komo korasones doloryozos, kanta el último kante,
kanta verso los últimos Djidyós en la tyerra de la Evropa.»

2.

— Kómo puedo yo kantar? Kómo puedo avrir mi boka
si uno so i solo esté i asolado me kedí —

Mi mujer i los mis pasharikos, todos los dos — ke espanto!

Me apanya un espanto... Yoran! Syento una endecha a lo leshos —

3.

«Kanta, kanta! Alevanta tu boz krevantada i doloryoza, byen fuerte.

Bushka! BúshkaLo ayí arriva, si dayinda está ayá —

i kántaLe... kántaLe el último kante del último Djidyó;

bivyó, muryó, no fue amortajado i se desapareyó...»

[...]

3 YIDDISH

Yiddish, while being a Germanic language, is the historical language of the Ashkenazi (or Ashkenazic) Jews, also referred to as Ashkenazim, those who had once occupied eastern and central Europe and who are now spread worldwide, but especially in the United States of America and the state of Israel. Furthermore, “*along with Hebrew and Aramaic, it is one of the three major literary languages of Jewish history.*”⁴

3.1 History of Yiddish and the Ashkenazi Jews

The name Ashkenazim, which is another way to call this Jewish ethnic group, comes from the Hebrew word *Ashkenaz* (אַשְׁכַּנַּז in Hebrew) used by the medieval rabbis when referring to Germany. So, as the name itself states, Germany was their country of origin.

In the 11th century of our age, Jews living in France and Italy left their homes and moved to the region that is now Germany, that is, to the area of the Rhine River. This was the place and time that Yiddish was born. These Jews spoke Romance languages and when they settled in these new places they started adopting the local Germanic dialect. Therefore, it can be affirmed that Yiddish first came into existence as a fusion language that consisted basically of Middle High German and of

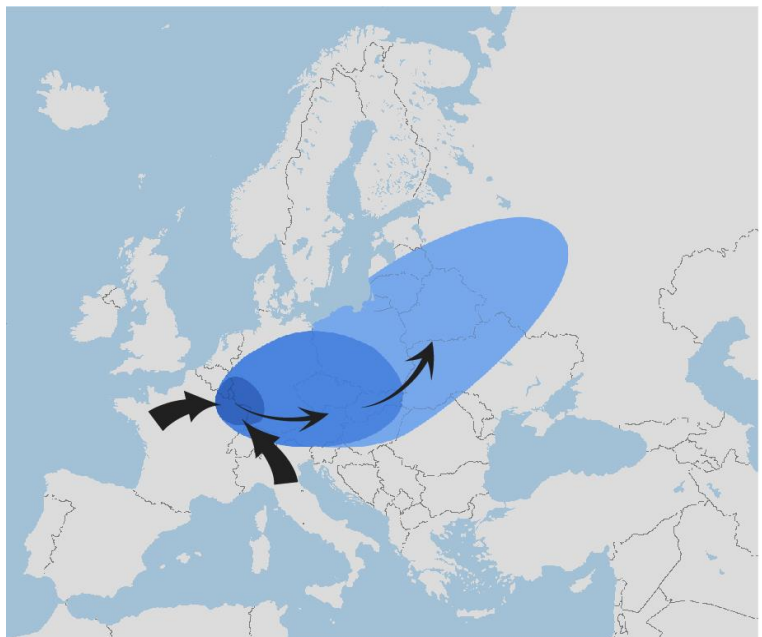


Illustration 2: Approximate Ashkenazi migrations and historical spread of Yiddish in Europe

Hebrew and Romance components. Later on, considering the massacres that took place during the Christian Crusades (11th to 13th centuries), countless Ashkenazi Jews migrated East, to central Europe (Austria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic...).

⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., Micropaedia, volume 12, page 843, “Yiddish language.” Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990.

After that more migrations occurred, this time towards Poland, Lithuania and Russia. There, the language inevitably acquired an enormous Slavic influence.

During the following centuries and especially during the 16th and 17th century, Yiddish became the lingua franca of Eastern Europe for the Jews and one of the most visible signs of their religious identity.

Poland became eventually the center of Ashkenazi communities; however, in the 17th and 18th centuries they suffered numerous massacres which provoked the flight of many Ashkenazim to the west of Europe (to Amsterdam, for example) and even to the New World. This Ashkenazi diaspora was followed by another one in the late 19th century and early 20th century due to Russian persecution. A large number of Jews migrated then to the United States, South Africa, Australia, Israel and other European countries.

During the last decades scholars have divided the history of Yiddish into different periods or stages, but have never agreed exactly on when these periods took place. This fact is illustrated below:

	Proto-Yiddish	Old Yiddish	Middle Yiddish	Modern Yiddish
<i>Encyclopaedia Britannica</i> (2010)	To 1250	1250 - 1500	1500 - 1750	1750 - present
<i>Dovid Katz</i> (1999)	To 1350	1350 - 1650	1650 - 1800	1800 - present
<i>Max Weinreich</i> (1973)	To 1250	1250 - 1500	1500 - 1700	1700 - present
<i>Joshua A. Fishman</i> (1965)		To 1350	1350 - 1650	1650 - present

3.1.1 19th and 20th century

The 19th and 20th centuries were key moments for the future of Ashkenazi Jewry. As I have commented above, during the last decades of the 1800s and especially during the first decades of the 1900s, many Yiddish speaking Jews migrated from Slavic and Hungarian-speaking countries mostly to the United States but to South Africa, Australia, Israel and Western countries of Europe too. This Great Migration, as it is sometimes referred to, was a consequence of the poverty of Ashkenazim in Austria-Hungary, the low status they held against the law in Russia and the massacres that took place there. Consequently, approximately 3 million Jews are calculated to have left Eastern Europe and established in America in less than half a century.

These Ashkenazi immigrants in the United States, since they were originally from different areas, spoke numerous Yiddish dialects. The development of a standard Yiddish starting in the mid-19th century did not have a relevant effect upon these communities. A mixture of the various dialects present in the diaspora was then born and is still present nowadays in the remaining Jews whose native tongue is Yiddish.

In the United States, the Ashkenazi communities' attitude towards their language and towards English was the same most other immigrants had. Being able to speak English meant you were Americanized and thus more advanced socially. In parallel, the more English words incorporated into Yiddish, the more social prestige.

On the other hand, the Jews that still lived in Eastern and Central Europe suffered the fate of the Holocaust. As it is well known, anti-Semitism was probably the most characteristic aspect of the Nazi German party. The extremism of their beliefs brought them to capture and exterminate up to 6 million Jews in very few years. This genocide had a huge impact on the future of Ashkenazi Jews. Since the Eastern European Ashkenazi community was the most numerous in relation to the number of its Yiddish speakers, the impact on Yiddish was catastrophic. The majority of those who were able to escape or survive settled in the newly-formed state of Israel.

3.1.2 Historical use of Yiddish

From the very beginning, Yiddish was used both orally and written, which means that it was used between family and friends but also in literature and liturgical studies.

This literary role, nonetheless, was first taken up by one dialect and after that by another⁵, as we will now see.

In the 16th century, Yiddish publications largely increased in number and, by this reason, a standardized literary language based on Western Yiddish appeared. Once the center of European Jewry shifted from Germany to Poland, at first, though, the western dialect continued to be the one used in literature. It was not until the arrival of the 19th century that Eastern Yiddish became the base of the literary language. As a result of this literary usage of Yiddish, there was a continuous contact of Yiddish with Hebrew-Aramaic texts and also with Germanic and Slavic languages. Consequently, these languages and their influence on Yiddish were key points during its evolution while evolving into a modern language.

3.1.3 Dialects of Yiddish

*“The basic dialectal division is between Western Yiddish, which occurs largely within the German language area, and Eastern Yiddish in the Slavic-speaking areas.”*⁶

What’s more, Eastern Yiddish has traditionally been divided into three distinctive subdialects: *Lithuanian* (or Northeastern), *Ukrainian* (or Southeastern) and *Polish* (or Central) Yiddish. Standard Yiddish is based on Eastern Yiddish, and mostly on its northeastern and southeastern varieties.



Illustration 3: Dialects of Yiddish. Source: <http://adkaplan.blogspot.com.es/2013/10/nowadays-yiddish.html>

Western Yiddish, as can be seen in the map above, was spoken “westward of the German-Polish frontier of 1939.”⁷ It was phonetically and lexically very different from

⁵ For more information on the Yiddish dialects see *Dialects of Yiddish* below.

⁶ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., Macropaedia, volume 22, page 667, “West Germanic languages.” Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990.

⁷ Weinreich, Uriel. *College Yiddish: an introduction to the Yiddish language and to Jewish life and culture*, 5th ed., page 43, “Dialects and the standard language”, New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1995.

the Eastern dialect, primarily because it had had no contact with any Slavic language. As the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says, as time passed, owing to its gradual assimilation to German, as well as to a political campaign to stamp out the language waged by adherents of the late 18th-century Germanizing movement, Western Yiddish faded into eventual extinction. Eastern Yiddish, nonetheless, flourished after Western Yiddish disappeared, as we have examined before.

3.2 Yiddish and Hasidic Jews

Hasidim are the Jews that form a religious sub-group within the Haredi Jewish movement, more commonly known as Ultra-Orthodoxy. Most Hasidic communities reside these days in Israel, North America (mostly in the United States of America) and Western Europe (primarily in Britain). What gives importance to this religious group in relation to my project is the high presence of Yiddish in daily common speech between its own members.

As the adjective *Ultra-Orthodox* itself clearly states, Hasidic Jews are characterized by their religious conservatism and, as a result of this, by their social seclusion. One of their means to remain faithful to their way of life and to prevent any possible approach to the modern dominant and secular culture, which in the United States of America could be identified as the process of *Americanization*, has always been the use of their own language, Yiddish, which marks a great distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish people and even Hasidim and non-Hasidim. Notwithstanding this, Yiddish is only looked upon as a vernacular language, as a way to communicate any Jewish-related subject and with historical respect, but not in order to express literature and art. In short, Yiddish identifies them as a separate group.

Jewish languages have historically always been associated with the preservation of traditional lifestyles and religious affairs. As we have already seen before in both of the languages I have analyzed, we can name a language Jewish when a language is almost solely used by Jews. In both of the above evaluated cases, the languages did derive from a non-Jewish language but had evolved in a unique and *Jewish* way. This fact gives the Jewish languages-speaking communities a reason to self-identify themselves and to mark a difference and distance with any other community. In the case of Yiddish, this is practically only reflected among the Hasidim's attitude towards the traditional Ashkenazi language.

The Hasidim in the United States of America, who are mostly located in the Northeastern and West coasts, do not refuse the English language in the manner that they reject the American culture; on the contrary, they believe that proficiency in English will give them more labor chances. This may probably be due to the low knowledge of English amongst the American Hasidic communities. In the years to come, once (or if) all Hasidim are able to master English, this attitude towards the dominant language may change. Nonetheless, it can be guaranteed that, at least in the near future, the imposition of English upon the Yiddish-speaking Hasidim and the subsequent loss of vernacular Yiddish can be denied.

Finally, the attitude of these towards Hebrew⁸ is totally different. For them, Hebrew has always been and still is the sacred tongue, the one of the Torah. Therefore, its legitimate use needs to be restricted to prayer, the study of Aramaic, Talmudic and classical Biblical Hebrew, and to any other religious or legal matter. As we will look at afterwards, Modern Hebrew is not only used in all aspects of life, including the secular ones, but has also been simplified and has adopted words from foreign languages. As Hasidim see it, with Modern Hebrew, the Holy language has been desacralized; it has lost its distinctive holiness. Thus, its current usage by many Jews is looked upon as irreligious and heretical and is wholly rejected.

3.3 Features of the language

Yiddish, as I have mentioned previously, is linguistically considered a fusion language. I will now tackle this subject more in depth.

We can talk about Yiddish from four different aspects, that is, from the different languages that take some part in either spoken or written Yiddish:

- *West Germanic* languages: the Jews that came from Romance-speaking countries adopted the local varieties of German spoken in the Rhine area. That being said, and considering the following historic influences of other German dialects on Yiddish, it can be affirmed that, even though Yiddish is indisputably based on Old High German, its vocabulary was affected by a mix of other German dialects too. As the years passed, the differences between Jewish and non-Jewish speech increased consistently considering that the Jews formed their own cultural community. Centuries later, once many Jews

⁸ For more information on Hebrew and on Modern Hebrew see *Hebrew* from page 18 onwards.

had migrated to Slavic-speaking countries, Yiddish developed independently from German and the German dialects that were evolving themselves in Germany. This way, their vocabulary, morphology and their sound systems diverged remarkably. German and Yiddish had no more direct contact until the 19th century, when some influential Jews dwelling in Western Europe started seeing German as a prestigious language and incorporated modern German words into their mother tongue, Yiddish. Subsequently, a purist resistance against these loans stopped this contamination, as they say it. However, many words had already been adopted into common Yiddish speech before anybody could prevent it, and are still used nowadays, now considered correctly used.

- *Romance languages*: it can be affirmed without hesitation that the old Romances of Italian and French were the substratum of Yiddish. As I have already specified, the Jews that had once inhabited the Rhine region, came from Northern France and Italy and so spoke Latin languages. Once the Ashkenazim took up the local German dialects, they incorporated many loanwords from the languages they had spoken before. While not all of these have survived until the present-day Yiddish, some are still used today. A very illustrative example is how the common verb *to read* is said in Yiddish: *leyen* (לייענען). With a quick look one can notice the Latin origin of this word: *legere*. Apart from this, as it happened with most European languages, some international words with a Latin (or Greek) origin were introduced into the language during the 19th and 20th centuries.
- *Slavic languages*: when most Ashkenazim migrated eastwards to Slavic-speaking countries, Yiddish speakers adopted Slavic elements (mainly loanwords) from Russian, Polish, Czech and Ukrainian into their speech.
- *Hebrew and Aramaic*: even before Yiddish was ever spoken, the ancestors of the future Ashkenazi Jews already used a large amount of Hebrew and Aramaic words in their daily vocabulary. Therefore, these were also incorporated into the new evolving language. Throughout the centuries, however, the form, meaning and pronunciation of many Hebrew words have changed, and their usage is determined by Yiddish grammar and style. Many of these words are either names or abstract terms related to morality and

philosophy and some others denote objects and practices related to Jewish religion and culture. Nonetheless, numerous words are also used today ordinarily in common speech. Finally, an curious fact is that there are many pairs of verbs in Yiddish, one coming from Hebrew and the other with a Germanic origin, in which the Hebrew word is more literary than the German one. This clearly reflects the prestige given to the *sacred language* in the Jewish world.

Lastly, as it could have been guessed, Yiddish is written in the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and has always been done likewise, which also means that it is written from right to left.

4 HEBREW

Hebrew, *Sefat Kena'an*, *Yehudit*, *Hebraios*, *Ibrit*, *Lason Ibri*: the Holy language (לְשׁוֹן קֹדֶשׁ, pronounced *loshon kodesh*), as the Jews have traditionally called it. For this is the sacred tongue of the Jewish people, the language “*in which God spoke to the children of Israel and gave them the Torah*”⁹, as they consider it.

The Hebrew language was the speech used by the inhabitants of the so-called *Land of Canaan* of the Bible from the year 1000 BC onwards. It is regarded as a Semitic language in linguistics. The Semitic languages' group, a subdivision of the greater Afro-Asiatic family, is formed, among others, by some well-known languages such as Arabic, Aramaic or Amharic, all originating from the Middle East.

4.1 History of Hebrew

In my project, since my focus is on the current Jewish languages, my main interest is in Modern Hebrew and not its ancient varieties, although I will briefly go through the whole history of this millennial language. Therefore, I will avoid going over the extensive history of the all-time Hebrew speakers and I will concentrate my efforts on talking about the much briefer history of Modern Hebrew speakers while talking about the language itself, because both issues are undoubtedly intertwined

4.1.1 Historical stages of Hebrew

The history of the Hebrew language can be split into four different periods:

1. *Biblical* Hebrew (pre-exilic and postexilic)
2. *Rabbinic* Hebrew
3. *Medieval* Hebrew
4. *Modern* Hebrew

Hebrew was the vernacular language of the majority of the *chosen people* until the 3rd century BC, when Aramaic started replacing it progressively. This replacement implicated a parallel influx of words from Aramaic into Biblical Hebrew, which, as the adjective itself states, was the language in which the Bible was written.

⁹ A. Fishman, Joshua. *Never say die! A thousand years of Yiddish in Jewish life and letters*, page 205, “Yiddish and Hebrew”, the Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1981.

The following stage, Rabbinic Hebrew, beginning in the first decades of our era, was the language used by the Rabbis for liturgical and study purposes after it had fallen off common use amongst many Jewish communities. It is also sometimes referred to as *Talmudic* or *Mishnaic* Hebrew, reflecting two of the major works of Rabbinic literature, the Talmud and the Mishna.

Medieval Hebrew is obviously the variety that was cultivated during the Middle Ages in the Jewish communities spread through vast areas. We can talk about Medieval Hebrew from the 5th to the 18th century BC, although during this time it coexisted with Rabbinic Hebrew too. It was the language of the great Jewish translators and writers throughout the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, it was not an independent stage of the language because it depended in great measure of Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew, as well as being heavily influenced by Arabic and, to a lesser extent, by the other contemporary languages in that time with a somewhat relevant contact with the Jewish communities.

I will refer to the history of Modern Hebrew in the following section, considering that my main focus of this part of my project is Hebrew in its modern usage and so deserves a deeper insight and understanding.

4.1.2 History of Modern Hebrew

The contemporary language is, compared to the previous stages of the language, substantially diverse, on the most part due to its being used as a vernacular language among all social groups. New words, expressions and ways to call all sort of things had to be invented, adopted from other foreign or current Jewish languages or changed in relation to earlier historical periods. Consequently, a transition from one phase to the other had to happen.

4.1.2.1 19th century: early stages of Modern Hebrew

Throughout the 19th century, and in a lesser degree during previous centuries, many learned Jews became aware of the precarious state of Hebrew in the Jewish communities in the diaspora because of the insufficiency of Hebrew in comparison to other languages, the use of Yiddish, considered a *corrupt* language, etc. The majority of writers that did their work in Hebrew used Biblical Hebrew as their main reference, the vocabulary of which was certainly limited. However, by the 19th century,

numerous authors, notwithstanding their Biblical basis, began introducing into their written language structures and elements from neighboring languages. Moreover, a large number of grammatical mistakes of all kinds were present in their works. Finally, considering the lack of sources for contemporary literary needs and to express modern terms, Biblical Hebrew was once again insufficient.

These new aspects introduced in the written language commented above were especially reflected in Mendele Moker Sefarim's¹⁰ work. Furthermore, he also allowed a great influence from Yiddish and from other stages of Hebrew besides the Biblical period. Nevertheless, the language originated by Mendele was only ever exclusively regarded as a literary language because the creator never had the intention to revive vernacular Hebrew.

4.1.2.2 Revival of Hebrew

This unique historical fact, the transformation of Hebrew from being a *frozen* language -as Arnau Pons¹¹ affirms- to a perfectly normalized modern language used by all social groups, was a result of the hard and persistent work of Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, among others who also contributed to it. This process started during the last decades of the 19th century and as the decades passed the goal was eventually achieved.

Geographically, we must situate ourselves in Palestine, which was probably the only place this *resurrection* could have had a possibility of success. Before there was ever any intention of reviving this language, the various Jewish communities living in the Holy Lands from different origins used some form of Hebrew as a means to communicate between themselves. It had somehow become a *lingua franca* between Jews that spoke different diaspora languages, although the conception of Hebrew as the *holy language* was still very much present and so prevented the true revival of this language as a normal modern language. Ben-Yehudah, whom I have mentioned above, arrived in Palestine in 1881 and he, instead, was determined to make Hebrew the vernacular language of the Jews in order to let the political and cultural rebirth of the Jewish nation take place; Hebrew needed to be given real life. Therefore, his job consisted of creating new words and expressions to substitute all the archaic ones. He started developing a Hebrew dictionary, *Thesaurus*, compiling historical words

¹⁰Considered by many the true creator of Modern Hebrew.

¹¹The Hebrew translator who I interviewed.

and recently created ones. In this way, Hebrew would be ready to be spoken in all contexts and by all social classes. Despite the significant role of Ben-Yehudah, also considering the fact that his son became the first native speaker of Hebrew in millennia and that he and his friends began speaking exclusively in Hebrew among themselves, his importance is mostly only symbolic.

The key point in this process was fulfilled by the developments executed by the Jews of the *First Aliyah*¹² (in Hebrew: עלייה) that took place from 1882 to 1903 and, after that, also with the help of the *Second Aliyah* (1904 - 1914). In these communities, from 1886 onwards, Hebrew became the language of education. Consequently, by 1903, Hebrew had already turned into the dominant language in many of the regions of the future state of Israel. After these first conquests in relation to education had been carried out, a setback appeared. Communities that had come during the *Second Aliyah* from diverse European countries wanted to promote, in addition to Hebrew, the language of their country of origin: English, German or French. However, both students and teachers protested against this and, eventually, a clear majority were in favor of the exclusive teaching in Hebrew.

Once these lands governed by the Ottoman Empire fell upon British rule (1920 - 1948), it was decreed that Hebrew, along with Arabic and English, be one of the three official languages of Palestine. By the second decade of the 1900s, an imposing and increasing 40% of the Jewish population claimed they spoke Hebrew as their mother tongue. After the declaration of independence of the state of Israel in 1948, the wealthy and successful future of Hebrew was unconditionally insured.

Finally, the major factor that helped in the rebirth of Hebrew, without which it could never have been revived, was the creation of the new state of Israel and the intentions behind this political affair. Zionism was the nationalist movement that supported the foundation of a Jewish national state in the ancient homeland of the Jews, Palestine. Along with this political ideology came the goal to establish Hebrew as the vernacular language of this country and, consequently, of all the Jews. Since Jews were arriving from numerous origins and speaking diverse languages, it made the most sense to choose as the national language one that did not give preference to someone and that at the same time could identify everyone as Jewish. Hebrew was the logical option.

¹² As the Britannica says: "In modern times, Aliyah has also been used to designate the "going up" to Israel of immigrants from other lands [...]".

4.2 Features of the contemporary language

Modern Hebrew, contemporary Hebrew, new Hebrew or Israeli Hebrew all refer to the same: the language spoken in the streets of Israel today. Throughout its short history it has been surrounded by intensive controversy because of its peculiarities, its independence in relation to earlier stages of the language and the differences present between common spoken Hebrew and the academic language. Thus I will talk about the features of Israeli Hebrew in the most faithful way possible trying to illustrate the most relevant components of the everyday language of Israeli Jews.

First of all, I must clarify that the rebirth of Hebrew should be put into context in what relates to two matters. The first is one has already been mentioned above: the modern language did not appear out of the blue because Hebrew had always been used in a lesser or greater extent throughout all the centuries, it had been, metaphorically, a *frozen* language. The second one refers to the fact that we must not consider that the language of the Bible has resurrected and is now spoken in the streets of Jerusalem because this language has suffered many transformations and innovations and barely resembles the language of the scriptures. Nonetheless, nobody can deny that many elements of the Biblical grammar and lexicon are still present in contemporary Hebrew, although greatly restructured and reorganized.

There have traditionally been many controversies in respect to whether Biblical or Rabbinic Hebrew had to be the basis of the modern language. In the end, some elements were taken from the Biblical period and others from the traditional language of the Rabbis.

As to what concerns vocabulary, these are some illustrative numbers:

- Around 8000 thousand words are of Biblical origin.
- Approximately 8000 more come from the Rabbinic language.
- Over 6000 were introduced from Medieval Hebrew.
- A further 18000 increased the Hebrew vocabulary during the 20th centuries from many different sources, but especially from Palestinian Arabic, English and Yiddish.

Considering this, vocabulary has obviously been greatly influenced. Even during the time when Ben-Yehudah began to create the *Thesaurus* dictionary, he was conscious of the need to either invent or incorporate loanwords from other

languages. He decided, therefore, that, in order to maintain the Semitic nature of the language, Arabic would be the best language to choose. In spite of his and other purists' efforts, English and other Western languages filled the role Ben-Yehudah had wanted Arabic to occupy.

In relation to morphology, many new compounds have been created and added to the common use. What's most significant is that Hebrew had previously been characterized by presenting few compound words. Despite this, Modern Hebrew is still quite faithful to Biblical morphology, even though it can mostly only be applied to the academic language and not to the colloquial usage.

Regarding the Hebrew syntax, this linguistic aspect has been heavily exposed to external influxes. The major transformations derive from the languages of the countries from where many Israeli Jews had come, but essentially English.

Already in the beginning, experts diverged on which writing system had to be implanted on Modern Hebrew. The language of the Bible did not write the vowels and adopting this orthography would have involved high grammatical knowledges on the writers' part. Finally, a system including some *matres lectionis*¹³, as opposed to writing all the vowels (represented by dots and lines on top or below the other letters), was adopted. However, a lack of indiscipline in spelling is still very much present. Finally, needless to say is that Hebrew is exclusively written in the Hebrew alphabet, called *Alefbet*.

Lastly, pronunciation has probably been one of the most discussed matters throughout Hebrew's short existence. To talk about this linguistic aspect we must go back to the traditional diaspora communities. Each of these communities, Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Mizrahi, for example, developed different Jewish traditions and, along with this, a particular pronunciation of their common liturgical language: Hebrew. The problem resides on the question of which traditional pronunciation had to be adopted into the language in order to have a standard one. In great measure because of these pronunciation issues, two dialects have emerged in Israel, which reflect the distant origins of Israeli Jews. *Western* Hebrew, spoken by Mizrahi Jews, those whose origins lie on Arabic-speaking countries, and *non-Western* Hebrew, the dialect identifying Ashkenazim and Sephardim, Jews coming from Europe and America.

¹³ Literally "mothers of reading", these are some vowels represented in letters to help the reader understand the words and text more easily.

As a result of all these transformations Hebrew has suffered during the last decades, some people have arrived to the point of not considering Hebrew a Semitic language anymore.

5 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT-DAY STATUS OF THE JEWISH LANGUAGES

In this part, I will talk about the current status of Hebrew, Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish from what I have personally investigated.

5.1 Survey

For the practical part of my project, I have made a survey with questions orientated towards either Jewish people or people with some connection to Judaism and Jewish traditions. Since I myself don't have enough contact with this profile, I have needed to find possible people to interview. My first idea was to go to the museum at *el Call* in Girona, where many Jews attend, in order to interview the Jewish tourists that visited it. I went there two days of August in the morning and was able to achieve 26 answers. Nevertheless, I received most of my responses, a further 79, via the internet.¹⁴ I contacted many people, associations and platforms who spread my survey through the internet either sending it to Jews privately or posting it in some places for people to see. Some of my main sources of answers have been: Twitter, Duolingo and Facebook, in order to contact specific people and associations, such as Yiddish Book Center, among others.

5.1.1 Questions

The following are the questions that I included in my survey:

1. How old are you?

- Less than 25
- 26 - 40
- 41 - 60
- 61 - 80
- More than 80

¹⁴ While this is the amount of responses that provided me useful information, the total number of answers sums up to 125.

In this question I aimed to know more or less in what generation each person could be assigned, for in the study of the current state of these particular languages generations are of great significance. What counts in one may not count in another, and vice versa. For example, the information I can extract from knowing that a 70 year old man speaks Yiddish, as opposed to a 20 year old also knowing it differs hugely.

2. What country are you from?

With this one my only intention was to be able to locate geographically my survey respondents. In every country the situation of a language may or may not vary remarkably. This is, therefore, one of my aspects to investigate.

3. What Jewish ethnic group do you belong to (Ashkenazi, Sephardi...)?

As we have been able to notice throughout the previous pages, the Jewish communities in the diaspora can and could be classified into different ethnic groups. Traditionally, each of these had a language that always distinguished them from other Jewish ethnic groups and at times from the non-Jewish communities in their contemporary country. Thus it is very easy for me to identify which language the person answering my questions or his ancestors should have theoretically sometime spoken. In practical terms: Ashkenazim are to be related with Yiddish, Sephardim with Judeo-Spanish, Mizrahim with Judeo-Arabic, etc.

4. If any of your family members speak/spoke a Jewish related language, which one is it?

- Yiddish
- Hebrew
- Judeo-Spanish
- Judeo-Arabic
- Other:

This one is basically to certify which is each respondent's historical language, because in some cases there could be exceptions.

5. If so, do you also know that language?

- Yes, I speak it.

- Yes, I have learnt it.
 - I am familiar with it.
 - I know some expressions and words.
 - I used to speak it, but I have forgotten almost all of it.
 - Other:

Here I tried to tackle what was the knowledge in any Jewish language of my survey respondents. This provides me with useful information on the current status of the languages I'm studying.

6. If your family spoke a Jewish language but doesn't anymore, until when was it spoken, approximately?

- My parents' generation speak/spoke it.
- My grandparents' generation speak/spoke it.
- My great grandparents' generation spoke it.
- Other:

My purpose for this question was obviously to be able to know until when some of these languages were used commonly, being already aware that in some countries and environments Yiddish or Ladino, for example, lost much of their social presence.

7. If so, why didn't they transmit it to the following generation?

Although being a fairly subjective, vague and risky question to add in the questionnaire, I took the risk to ask it and has been, in fact, reasonably successful, as we will see in the following section of the project.

8. Is there anything else you'd like to comment?

I included this one just in case someone wanted to add any additional information.

9. Would you mind giving me your e-mail in case I wanted to contact you sometime for the purpose of this project?

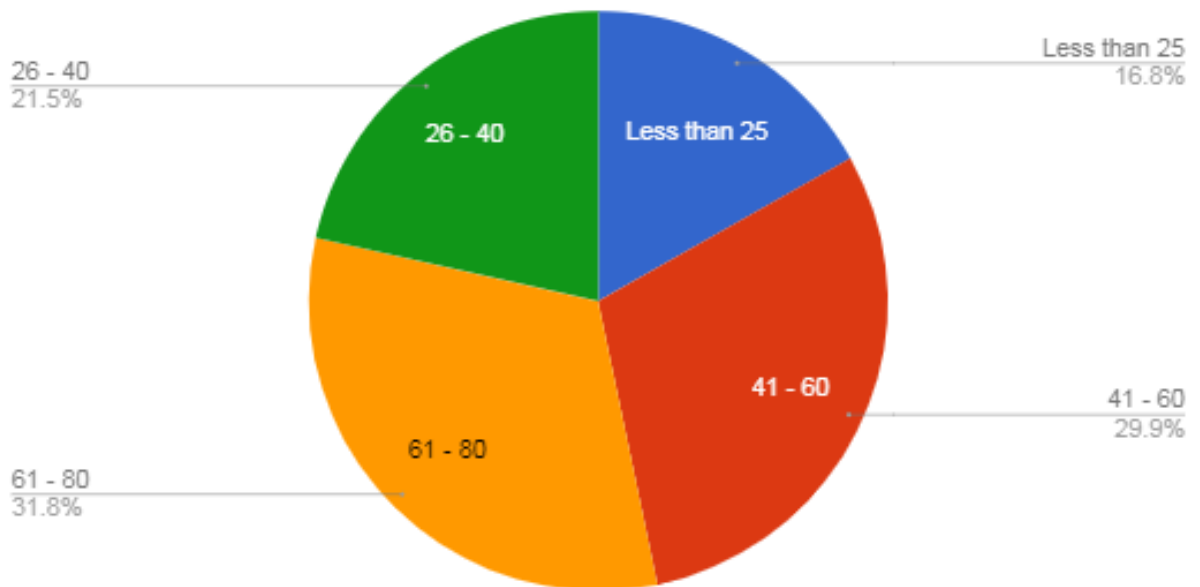
Finally, I asked for their contact for further purposes related to the project.

5.1.2 Answers

Below I have compiled the answers obtained from 107 different people, arranged in the order of the questions. On the one hand, the responses to the first six questions are presented in graphics because this was the most effective and useful way for me. On the other hand, seeing the difficulty and pointlessness in including the answers to question number seven graphically, they have not been explicitly added. Instead, I will refer to them in a general perspective in the conclusions I have extracted from the answers to all the questions. Finally, I do not mention the responses from the eighth and ninth questions because only some provided me additional information, which could be perfectly incorporated somewhere else – either in other questions or in the conclusions.

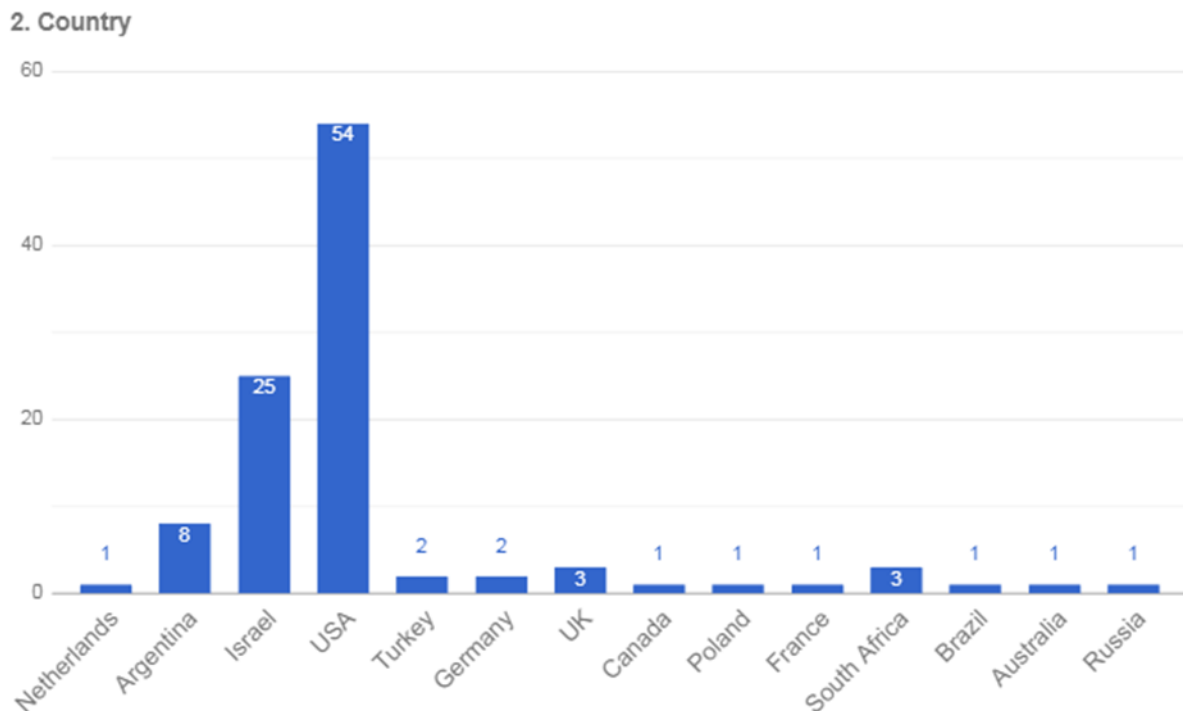
1st question: How old are you?

1. Age range



As is illustrated above, I was able to get answers from people with numerous diverse ages but, since my survey was mostly internet-based, I was unable to contact anyone older than 80 years old.

2nd question: What country are you from?

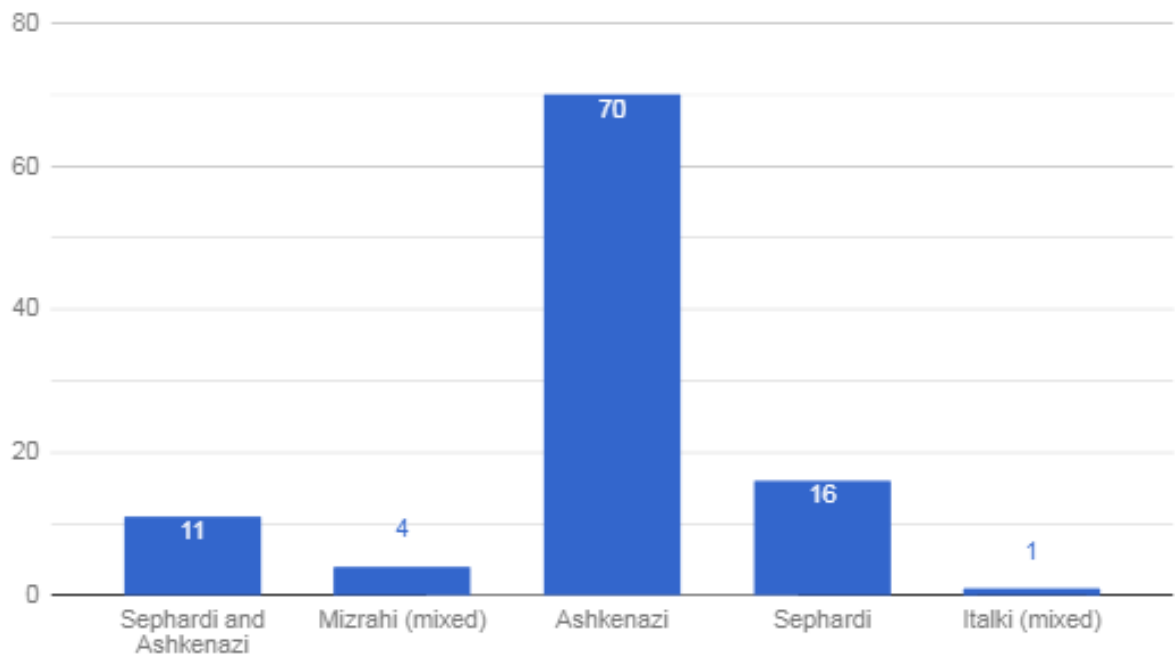


I was quite successful in contacting people from a significant amount of countries - 14 to be precise. Furthermore, if we take a look at the list of countries with the biggest Jewish population, in each of these we can easily notice the similarity between the proportion of answers from some countries and their respective number of Jewish citizens. In this way, I can confirm that my answers are quite representative of the global Jewish population. However, it should be noted that a similar number in the answers coming from Israel and the USA would have been more faithful to the reality.¹⁵

¹⁵ Thus, when comparing answers from these two countries, it should not be misunderstood by assuming more Ashkenazi, for example, live in the USA and less in the Holy Lands; it is only a matter of where I have been able to get most respondents from - in this case from the USA - with the means I have used to contact Jewish people.

3rd question: What Jewish ethnic group do you belong to?

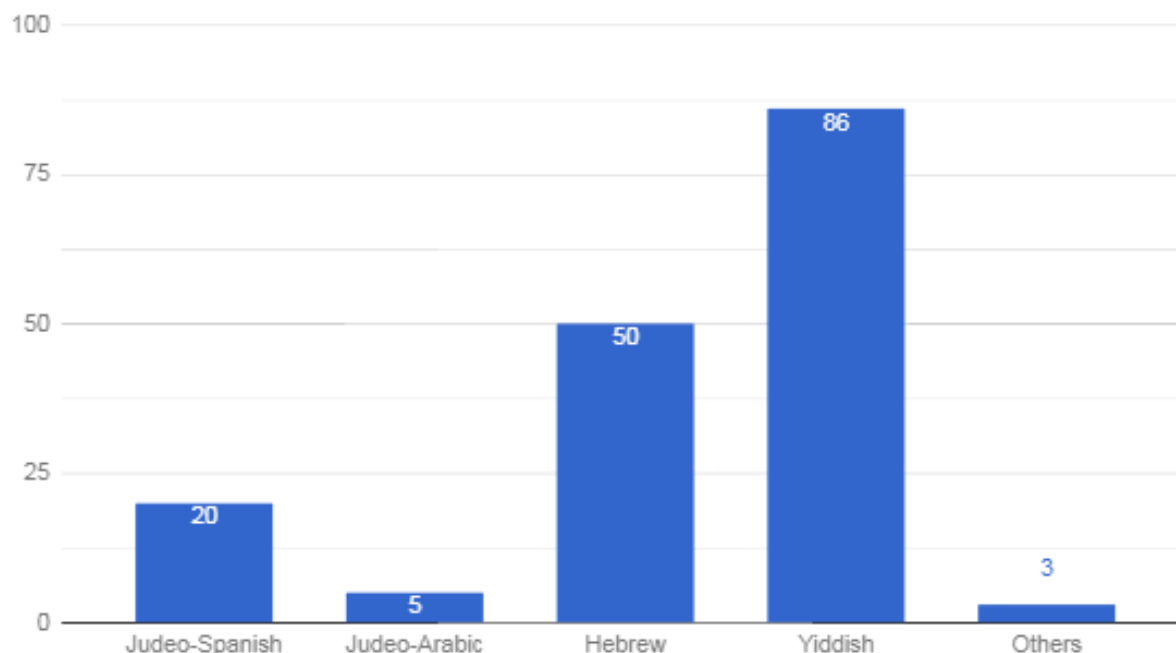
3. Jewish ethnic group



Once again, my answers reflect well the Jewish statistics in what refers to the belonging to a certain Jewish ethnic group. Nevertheless, the low presence of Mizrahi Jews is also partly due to my difficulty to reach this community with so few connections to our European society.

4th question: If any of your family members speak/spoke a Jewish related language, which one is it? (more than one possible answer)

4. Jewish language



In the *others* section Judeo-English, Italkit (or Judeo-Italian) and Neo-Aramaic (or Judeo-Aramaic) are included, with one answer for each.

Out of the 107 people polled who provided useful answers, when asked “If any of your family members speak/spoke a Jewish related language, which one is it?”, most responded in accordance with their previous answer on their Jewish ethnic group.

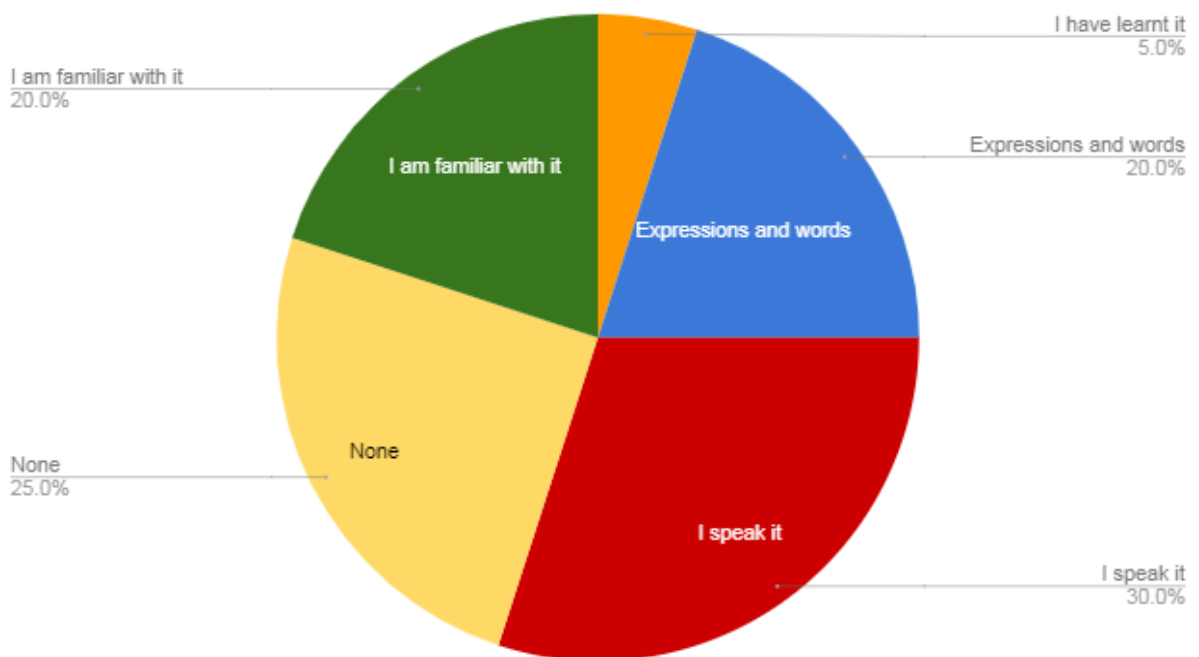
If we compare the responses, while 73 people considered themselves fully Ashkenazi and 11 half Ashkenazi, summing up to 84, 86 declared they or their family spoke or had spoken Yiddish, either in the present or in the past. A similar proportion can be claimed for Judeo-Spanish: while 27 people considered themselves either fully or partly Sephardi, 20 people assured their or one of their traditional Jewish languages was Judeo-Spanish. Finally, 5 claimed to have some relation to Judeo-Arabic, while 4 considered themselves partly Mizrahi.

Hebrew is, of course, a different case. There is no ethnic group whose language is specifically Hebrew. We can basically relate a Hebrew speaker either with Israeli citizenship or with the learning of Hebrew in other places, such as the USA.

5th question: If so, do you also know that (the previously mentioned) language?
(more than one possible answer)

I have arranged the answers to this question in various sections - one for each language: Judeo-Spanish, Yiddish and Hebrew. Besides this, since I have obtained a higher considerable amount of answers relating to Yiddish, I have had the opportunity to extract more information and have added further parts in this section, as you will notice ahead.

5.1. Judeo-Spanish knowledge (20 answers)



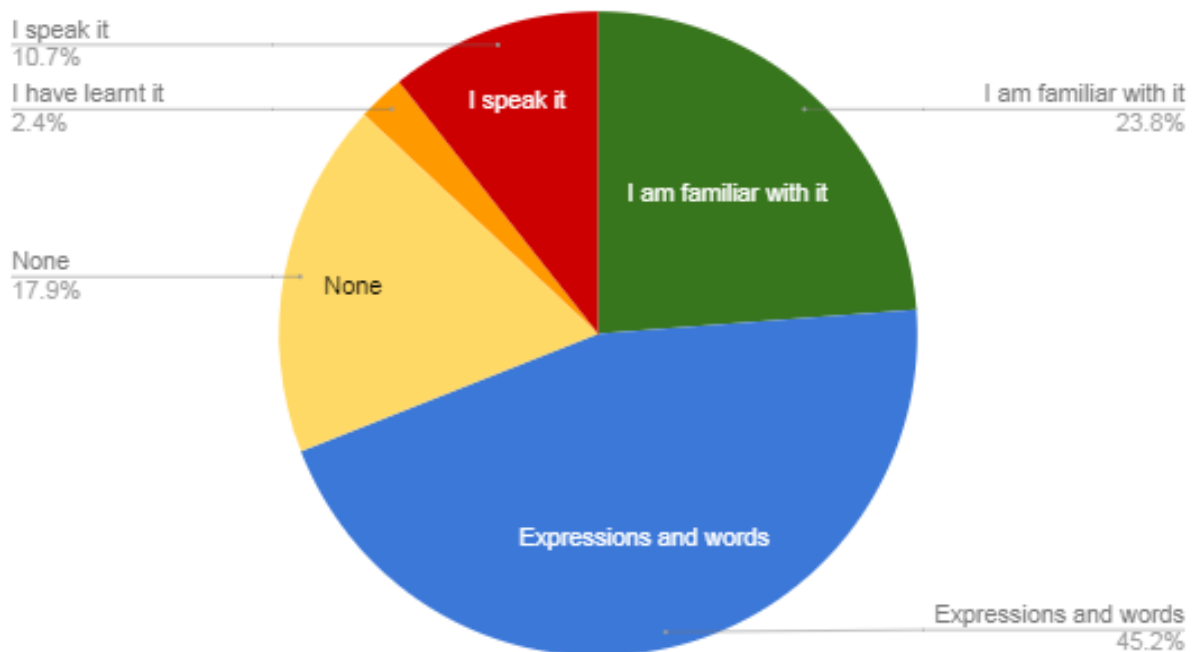
As it is illustrated in this graphic, from a sample of 20 people from 6 different countries, the condition of this Jewish language is clearly not the most prosperous one for a modern language. While it is true that around a third of the sample claims to speak the language fluently, we should also take into account that at least two speakers (out of the 7) that we can be certain of have cut the generation transmission of the language, no longer teaching it to their children. That would mean that there is roughly a 30% less speakers in the youngest generation.

On the other hand, a total of one fourth of the surveyed people declare having absolutely no knowledge of their traditional family language. This may reflect the refusal of Sephardi Jews towards their cultural customs, especially present in the Israeli society with the acquisition of Hebrew as the suitable Jewish language for

everyone. Nonetheless, a significant 40% confirms to have some contact with Judeo-Spanish – either being familiar with it or knowing some expressions and words. While in some cases this contact I mention may be very limited, it represents that either someone in the family spoke the language (e.g. grandparents) or that some expressions have remained of Judeo-Spanish in the more recently adopted language.

With these conclusions I would dare to predict that, in the near future, the percentage of people who know some expressions and words of this Jewish language will probably increase, while the number of fluent speaker might decrease. The doubt is located on the “no knowledge” people. Is Judeo-Spanish old-fashioned or can it coexist with other modern languages such as Hebrew and English? Do Sephardi Jews want to forget their traditional lifestyle completely? The response to this question might help solve the enigma of the apparent dark future that awaits this language.

5.2. Yiddish knowledge (83 answers)



In what refers to Yiddish, out of the 86 people claiming their traditional Jewish language was Yiddish, 83 answers have provided useful information¹⁶. Comparing these answers with those of Judeo-Spanish, we can easily notice striking differences.

At first sight, we can distinguish a more noticeable presence of people knowing some expressions and words of Yiddish and a smaller proportion of fluent speakers. While it is also true that a smaller percentage of the sample guarantees to have no knowledge of the language, the difference is not as significant. A similar situation can be applied to Yiddish learners, though in both cases it has little relevance - seeing a 5% and a 2.4%, respectively.

Without analyzing the answers in comparison to the previous ones, what else can we decipher from this sample? While we do see a very limited 10.7% of people affirming their native knowledge and a further irrelevant 2.4% claiming their learnt ability to speak Yiddish, we should also avoid underrating the relative significance of a high presence of Ashkenazi or Ashkenazi descendants with a bigger or smaller contact with their traditional Jewish language. The importance we can give to this 45% of people knowing some Yiddish expressions and words is nonetheless, almost exclusively symbolic. Similarly, as it happened to Judeo-Spanish, this contact is not

¹⁶ In three cases the answers to some questions were ambiguous and, consequently, I did not add them in this graphic.

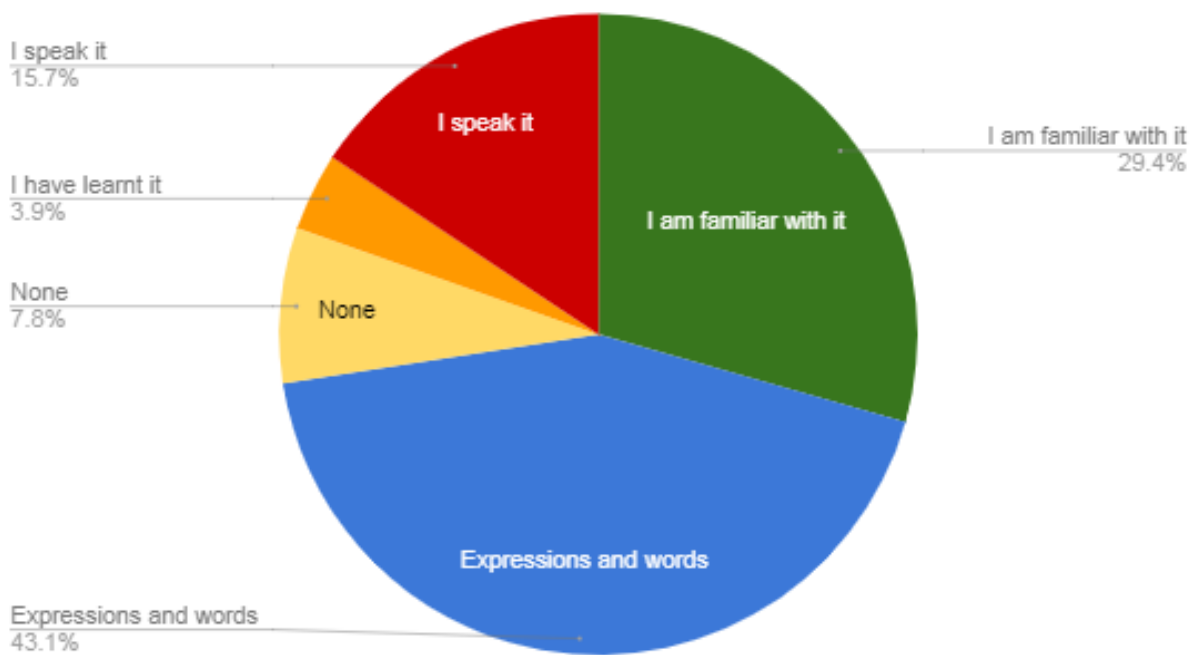
by chance: it may explain the only partial abandonment of the language in the family linguistic uses. It remains to be seen, though, whether the new generations will identify themselves with, or even tolerate such linguistic uses, so often considered - arguably wrongly, from my point of view- old-fashioned. As we will now examine, this situation is not the same everywhere.

Since more than half the people who responded “Yiddish” in the fourth question are from the USA, and around 15 others from Israel, I have decided to contrast the answers received from Israelis and North-Americans, in order to detect any similarities or differences. Comparing the status of Yiddish in the United States with that in Israel might give us a wider general perspective.

After comparing the answers obtained from people from different countries, I will also contrast the answers from various age groups.¹⁷

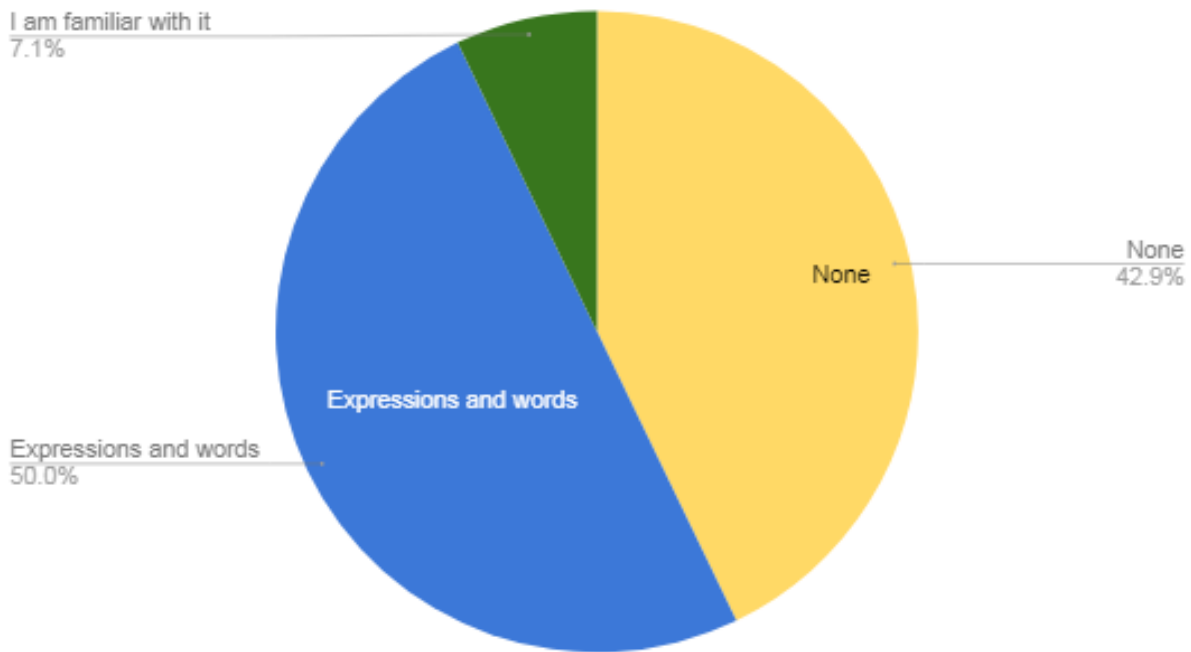
¹⁷ Though I had answers from four different age groups (less than 25, between 26 and 40, from 41 and 60 and between 61 and 80), I did not have enough responses for the first age group (barely 13) in order to be able to extract any conclusions.

5.2.1.1. Yiddish knowledge in the USA



Comparing this graphic with the one on *Yiddish knowledge* (worldwide), at first view what strikes us most is (1) the significant decrease of people having no knowledge of the language (from an 18% to a an 8%), (2) the not so significant increase in fluent speakers (from an 11% to a 16%) and (3) the trivial increase by a roughly 5% (from 24% to 29%) in people having a familiarity with Yiddish. The situation is, therefore, slightly more optimistic.

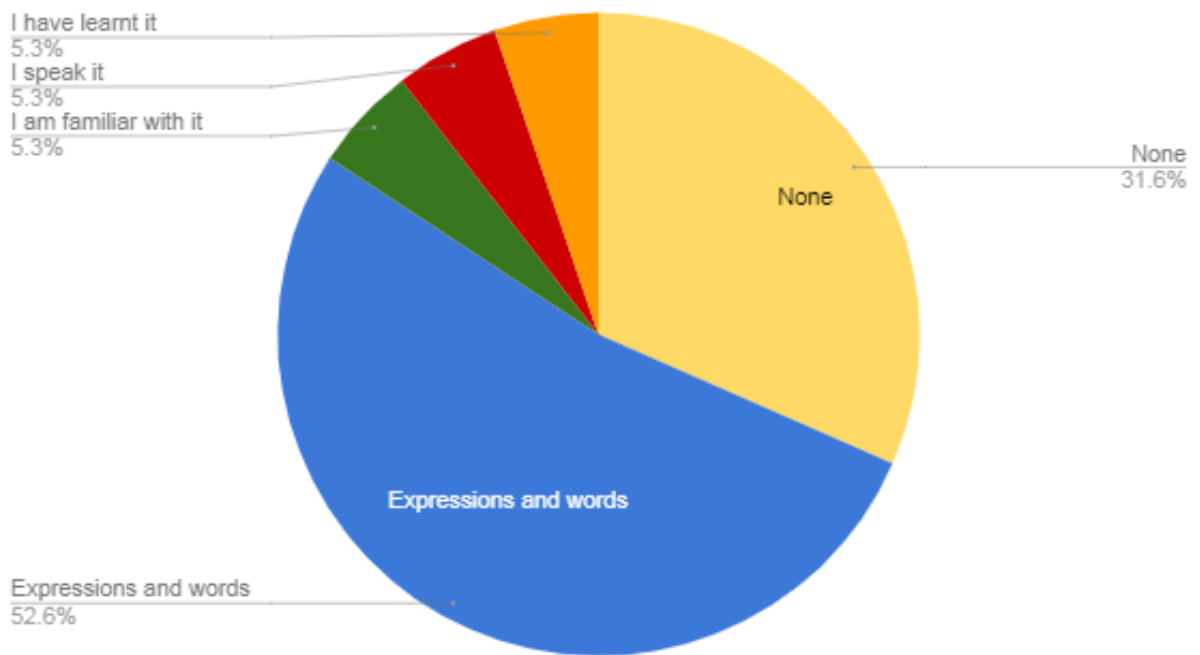
5.2.1.2 Yiddish knowledge in Israel



In Israel, instead, though the sample is much smaller -placed at 14 answers-, the answers reflect a very different and, unfortunately, more pessimistic linguistic environment. While I did not find any Israeli who technically spoke Yiddish, there are surely many Ashkenazim or Jews with Ashkenazi ancestry who are still able to speak it. However, the proportion of speakers is apparently lower in Israel than in other countries. The possible reasons for this will be argued further ahead.

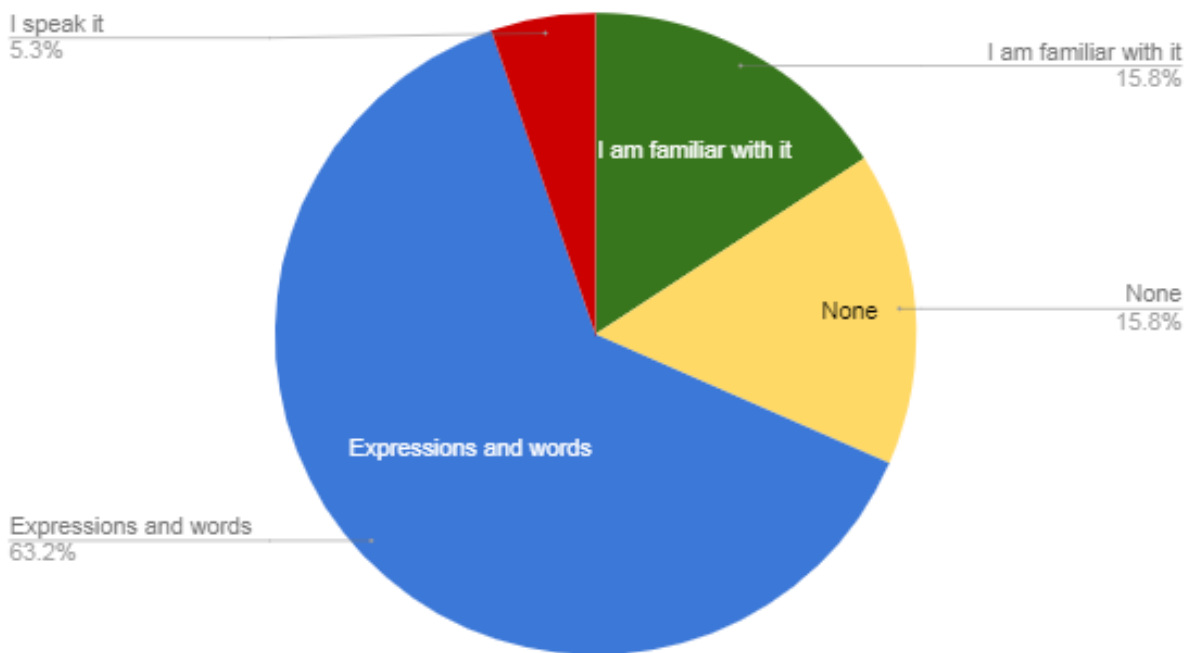
We also quickly notice this imposing 43% of people assigning themselves to the “no knowledge” group. As opposed to this, the remaining percentage declares to either knowing some Yiddish expressions or being familiar with the language. The first option, upheld by half the surveyed Israelis, had also an important representation in previous graphics, especially in what concerns the Yiddish tongue. This could reflect the reality of a society which is forgetting -willingly or unwillingly-, their own history. Once we have analyzed the answers to the following questions, we might be able to clarify and specify more aspects.

5.2.2.1. Yiddish knowledge (26 - 40 years old)



Comparing the Yiddish knowledge in this age group to the whole sample without taking into account the difference in ages, we are able to see that the situation is definitely worse. While there are more than a 50% of respondents with some (little) knowledge of the language, this is nearly meaningless. Furthermore, this one third of people with absolutely no knowledge demonstrates both a low interest in Yiddish and little presence of Yiddish in the current modern societies. On top of all, the already low percentage of Yiddish speakers that rested at around a 10% in all age groups, here dwindles even more.

5.2.2.2. Yiddish knowledge (41 - 60 years old)



Though the number of real speakers does not decline from the previous age group, we do notice some encouraging differences. First off, in this age group we only see a 15% of people claiming to have no Yiddish knowledge, while in the younger age group this percentage counted up to more than a 30%, doubling the numbers. This number is, in fact, almost the same as in the *all ages* graphic. Here more people also affirm to have some knowledge of the language, although this increase can particularly be seen in people who have some level of familiarity with Yiddish, more than just knowing a few phrases.

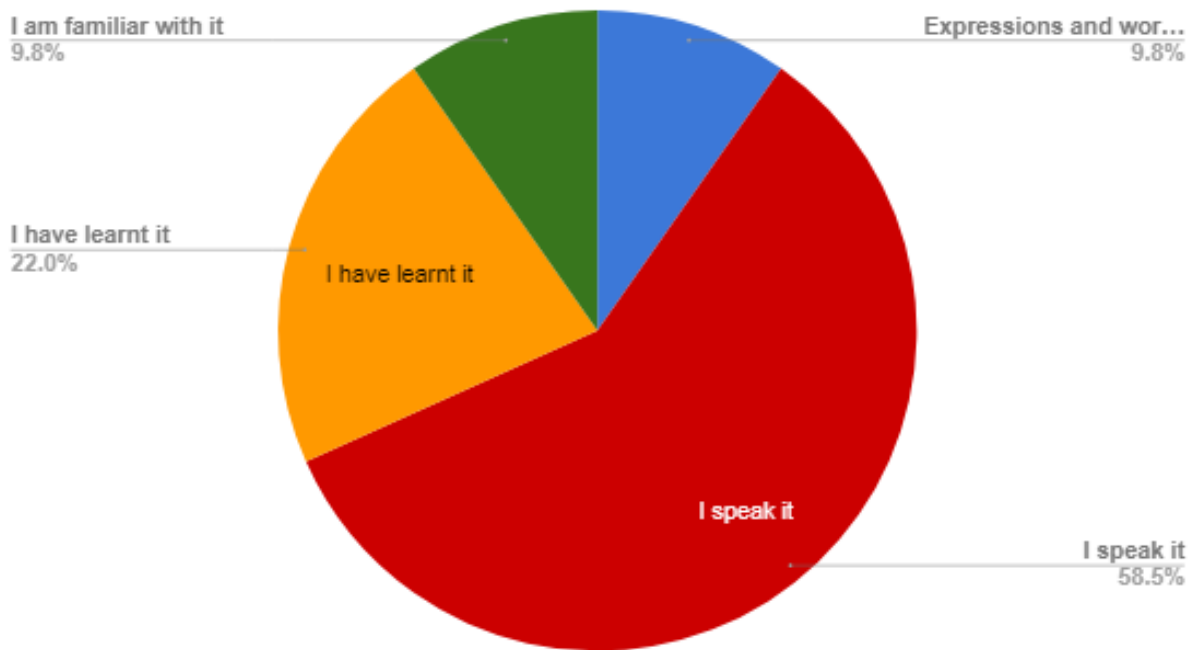
5.2.2.3. Yiddish knowledge (61 - 80 years old)



Finally, these answers demonstrate that there would be no mistake in saying that the older someone is, the more possibilities he or she has to either speak or have had at least some contact with Yiddish. In this age group, for example, we see the highest percentage of speakers, an impressive roughly 40% of people familiar with Yiddish and the lowest proportion of people with no knowledge of the language.

In conclusion, this does not give much hope. A language, for it to be fully alive, needs to be spoken by not just an age group or some social classes but by everybody; it has to live in the lives of the people.

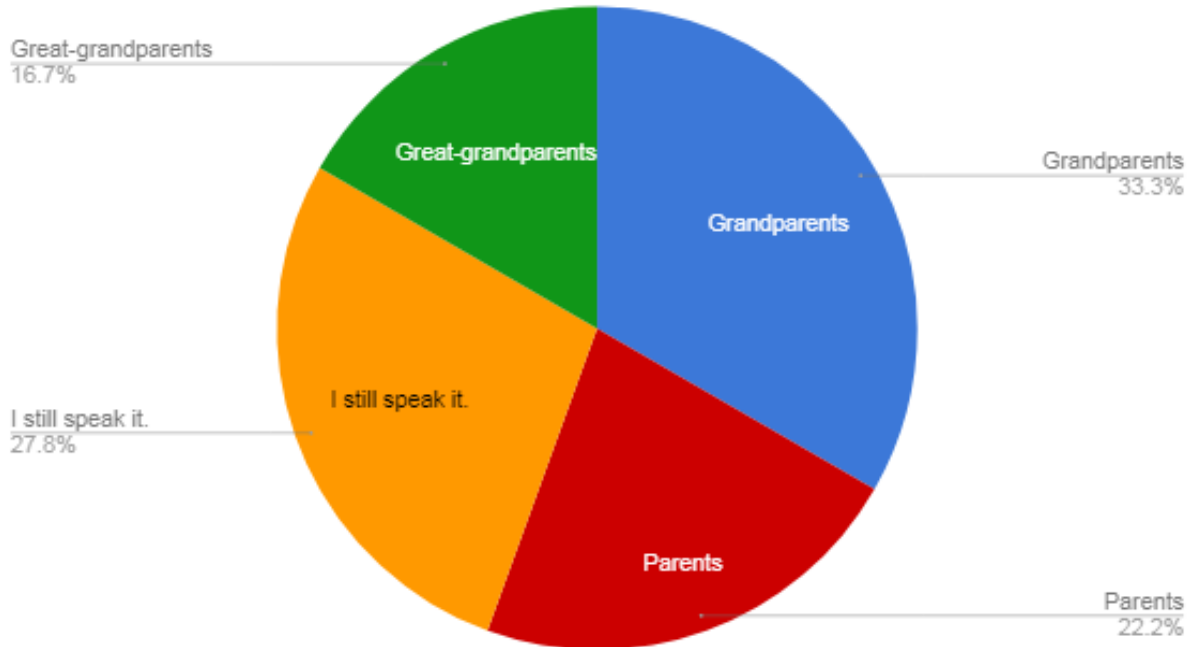
5.3. Hebrew knowledge (41 answers)



As could already be assumed, out of the three investigated languages Hebrew is the one that enjoys the most comfortable position. While the majority of fluent speakers are from Israel, where all Jews speak it, in Jewish communities in the diaspora learning Hebrew is a common situation. This is confirmed with this high amount of Hebrew speakers -a roughly 60%-, all coming from Israel, and the remarkable percentage -situated at 22%- of learners. In traditional Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities Hebrew was learnt by many of its adherents in order to at least be able to read the Torah; but while in these cases the studied language was not a normal spoken and modern language, and thus very hard to learn, the contemporary communities can choose between two options: either Biblical Hebrew or Modern Hebrew, an easier language to learn.

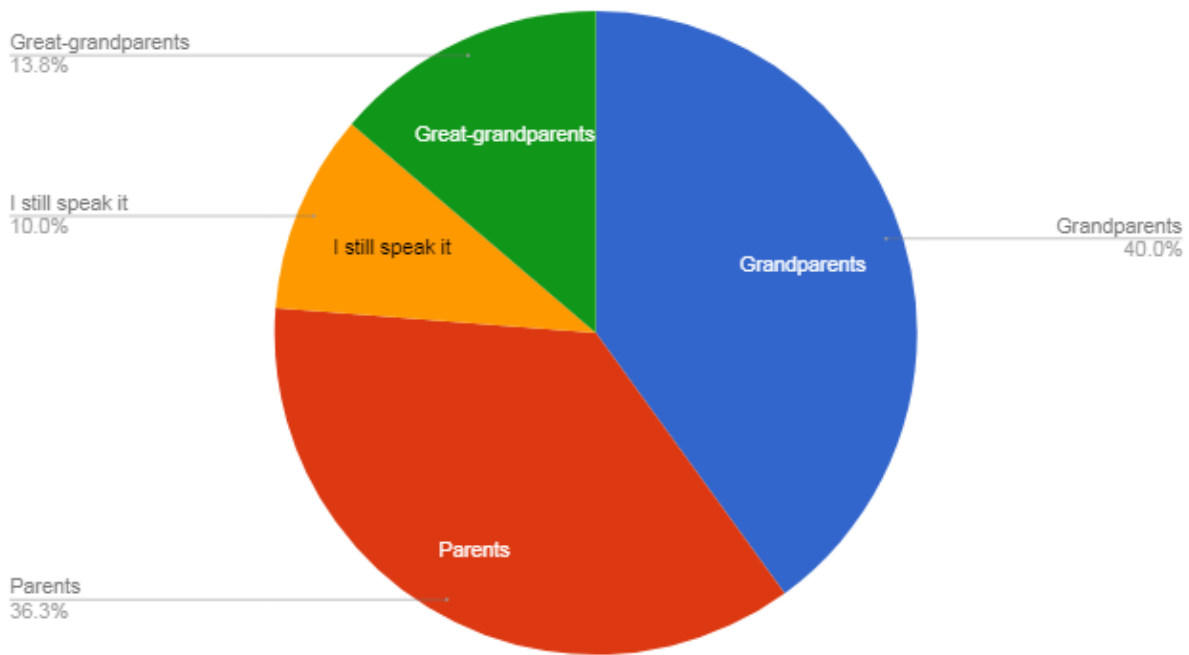
6th question: If your family spoke a Jewish language but doesn't anymore, until when was it spoken, approximately?

6.1. Last generation that spoke Judeo-Spanish



If we consider that the sample barely summed up to 18 people, we can determine that the four options had a similar number of respondents (all were between 3 and 6). Therefore, the high percentage of families who still preserve the language is significant.

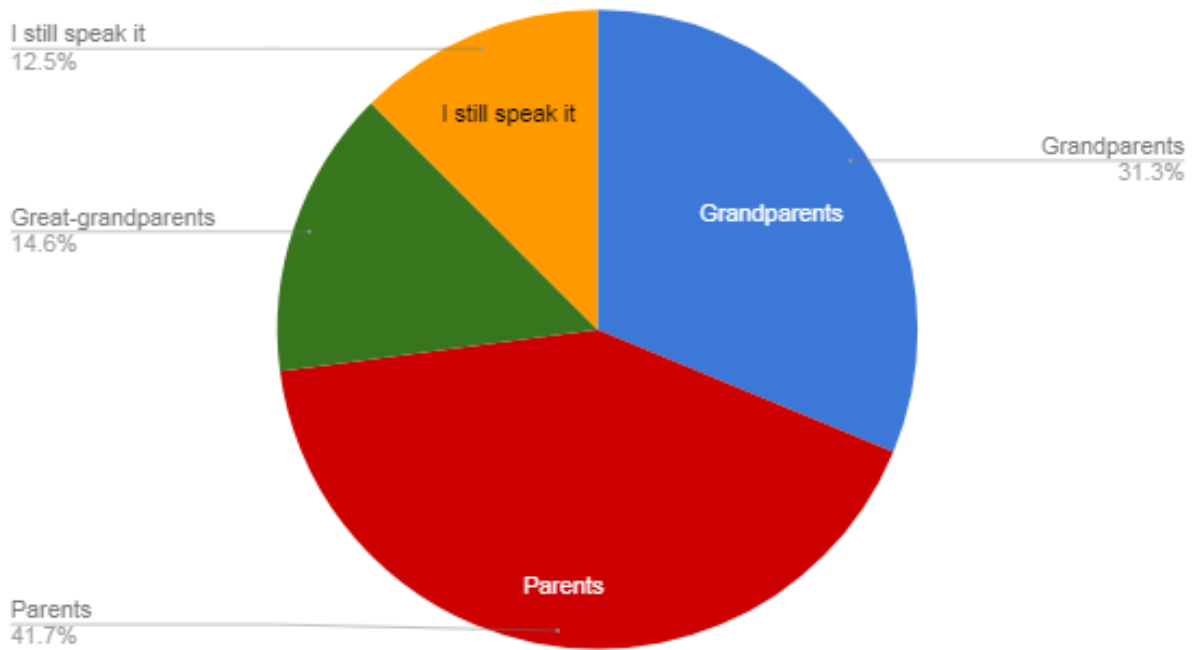
6.2. Last generation that spoke Yiddish



First of all, it's essential to take into account that many Ashkenazim started migrating to America in the beginning of the previous century and that the majority of Ashkenazim living in Israel nowadays settled there after World War II. Hence we should also analyze the answers received from these two different countries to check any possible distinctions. Before getting into this, though, let me go over the overall graphic quickly.

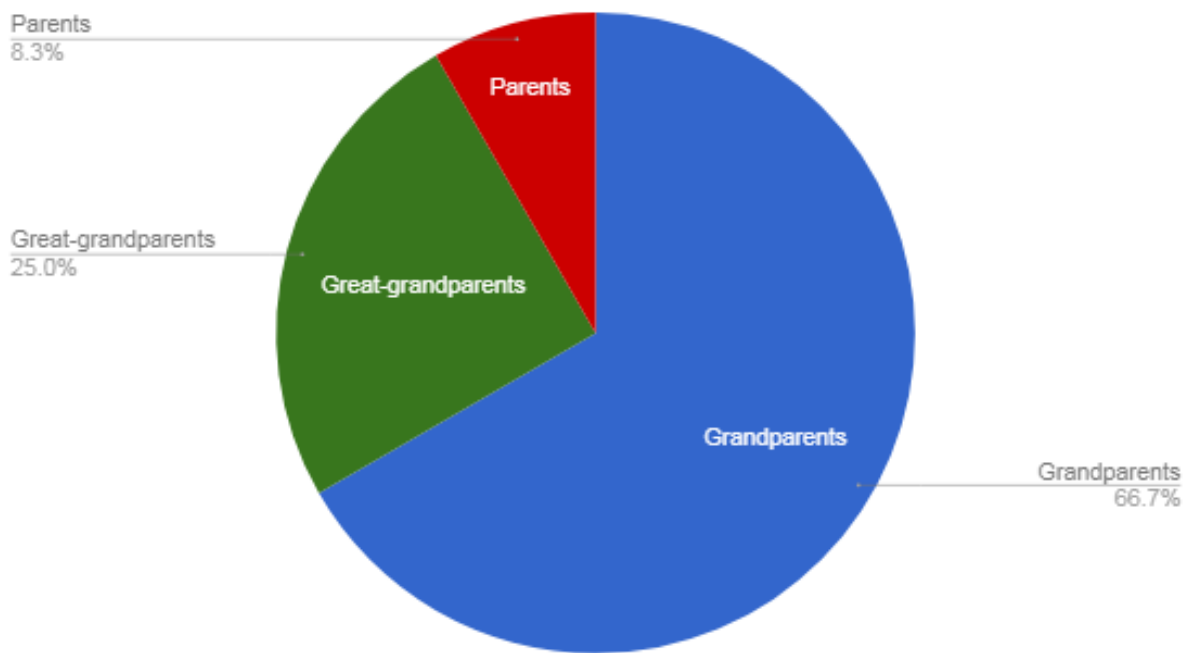
We notice at first glance that two generations -parents and grandparents- take up to almost 80% of the answers. This means that, adding the 10% of speakers, approximately 90% can easily have had some contact either with Yiddish or with a generation whose language was Yiddish, which is indisputably not insignificant.

6.2.1. Last generation that spoke Yiddish in the USA



The first thought that comes in mind is the similarity with the previous graphic, and it's true, there are few differences. This may be explained considering that a majority of answers -48 out of 80- were already from North-Americans.

6.2.2. Last generation that spoke Yiddish in Israel



Here, instead, there is no need to look for possible differences. In this case, two thirds -in contrast with a one third in the USA- declare that their grandparents last spoke Yiddish, while less than 10% affirm it was their parents -which is a serious decrease. Finally, great-grandparents here acquire a significant role: one fourth of the total sample. A very limited sample, I should recognize, which does not provide the faithfulness I would have preferred. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the situation is certainly worse in Israel. Perhaps with the answers to the following and last question¹⁸ we may discover the reasons for these drastic differences.

¹⁸ Although technically not being the last question in the survey, I have decided not to include explicitly some answers for various reasons concerning usefulness.

7th question: If so (if your family spoke a Jewish language but doesn't anymore), why didn't they transmit it to the following generation?

Since the answers received were many and very diverse, it is impossible to present them graphically. Therefore, I will limit myself to talk generally about what kind of answers I have gotten grouping them together according to their similarities and what information was useful for me. Thus, below are arranged all the answers, a total of eighty-three.

- Sixteen people said their families had cut the linguistic tradition because of the *assimilation* process that took place in their diaspora countries -mostly in the USA but also in South Africa, for example. This refers to many of those Jews that, leaving Europe and settling in foreign countries, were “swallowed” by the non-Jewish society that surrounded them. While some were willing to leave their traditions in order to belong to the new and modern culture, in other cases numerous Jews were reluctant to abandon their language and customs but were either forced or needed to do so.
- Eleven people, all from Israel, declared their ancestors had abandoned their language because *only Hebrew was spoken* anymore. This is, we can notice, one of the most important reasons of the decline of Yiddish, Judeo-Spanish and Judeo-Arabic speakers in Israel. When many Jews go to live there, they notice everybody uses Hebrew in their daily lives and that there is no space left for their historic languages.
- Ten people assured that *the importance of other languages* -English, French, Hebrew, Afrikaans, etc.- contributed to the decline of speakers worldwide, such as in the USA, the UK, France, South Africa and Morocco.
- Nine people said that their diaspora Jewish languages had been frowned upon and that their ancestors had to stop speaking them due to this. While in one case one Dutch person blamed the fear they felt, three others from Israel argued that it was the shame they felt that brought them to abandon their language. This is an important matter which I will later on refer to. Finally, I can also determine that this situation of social denial could also be witnessed in the USA, Russia, and the UK.
- Five people said that there had been *no need* for them to keep on speaking Yiddish or Ladino, for example. This can be detected in many diaspora countries, such as Canada, the USA, Australia and Argentina.

Moreover, in contrast with this, one person affirmed that it was not the uselessness of the language but the *need* to leave behind their language, Yiddish, which explains why the current generation does not speak it anymore.

- Five people upheld that they had had *nobody with whom to speak it*, and in two of these cases the parents did not come from the same backgrounds and so spoke different languages. This situation, according to my answers, can be seen in numerous places such as Argentina, the USA, Israel and Brazil.
- Four people, three from the USA and one from Canada, stated that Yiddish had last been used in their families as a *secret language*, when they did not want someone to understand it like their children, for example.
- Two people from Turkey claimed that *social difficulties* had deteriorated the status of Judeo-Spanish in a country where this language had been present throughout the last five centuries. These answers can be easily compared to bibliographic information I have read from books and webpages where it was claimed that, with the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, numerous campaigns in order for everyone to speak Turkish had a great impact on Judeo-Spanish.
- One person guaranteed that Judeo-Spanish disappeared in his family because in Morocco it had gradually become almost exactly as Modern Spanish. This is, in fact, something I have already mentioned when talking about the Haketia dialect in my Judeo-Spanish part.
- Fifteen people assured that the reason was the *demise* of those who spoke it. This was, of course, quite obvious, so I assumed they had misunderstood my question. Had this been the case or had it been something else, the fact is that these answers were worthless for me.
- Some further answers I received did not give me any relevant information.

5.2 Conclusions

As I have already demonstrated, there is a large amount of information and conclusions that can be extracted from all these answers I have succeeded in gathering. Furthermore, some of these conclusions, which I will now tackle more in

depth, can be compared to information I have collected from various sources¹⁹, as I will mention whenever it is suitable. I will also add information in order to contextualize certain aspects which I may or may have not commented previously in some part.

First off, we should know that it is impossible to talk about one of the three studied languages without taking into account at least one of the two others. The current status of Yiddish, Judeo-Spanish and Hebrew is intertwined to such a degree that a decline in the number of speakers of one can be explained by the rise in number of speakers of another one.

Throughout this last century, Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish have gradually become minority and endangered languages worldwide. Most traditional Jewish communities have eventually disintegrated either due to the massacre of the Holocaust or because many were forced to exile to other places such as Western Europe, America and Israel (not just after and during the Holocaust but also because of crisis, epidemics and the First World War before that). These communities had always lived with and *in* their own languages and along with the fading of these, their speech started to die with them too. In their new countries, a huge amount of Jews sacrificed their language, tradition and history in order to acquire a new identity; they were no longer Ashkenazi and Sephardi, they were now American and Israeli. And with this new identity came a new language.

Taking a glance at the condition of the Jewish languages in the USA, we realize that both Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish are gradually becoming less and less present in the Jewish communities. Though there are still old people who speak the languages and many more who are somewhat familiar with it, every new generation is more and more separated from their ancestral language. As we have analyzed before, this is mainly due to the will of many Jewish immigrants to be Americanized (assimilated into the American society) and that way be more integrated into their new society. This new community's language was English and , consequently, there was no use in speaking any other language. In other words, it was more advisable and useful to speak the dominant language. Furthermore, while Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish were gradually dissipating, the importance given to Hebrew -both by the Zionist movement

¹⁹ All the sources are included in the bibliography at the end.

and by the liturgical purposes- contributed to this linguistic eclipse. However, this is a much more significant phenomenon in Israel, as we shall now see.

On the other hand, let's take a look at the linguistic situation in Israel. Hebrew, the language that was revived in this same country, could not fully live with other languages like Ladino around. Hebrew had to be the new language of all the Jews, and there was little space for Yiddish left. While many people stopped speaking their diaspora languages because everybody spoke Hebrew there and they needed to feel integrated, in many cases those immigrants that came from Poland, for example, had to be ashamed of themselves for speaking Yiddish and anybody speaking it would be frowned upon. Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish were seen as a threat to this new state that was being created with a unique language that would unify all the Jews coming from tens of different countries. In spite of the attempts to maintain Ashkenazi and Sephardi traditions, along with their respective languages, such as the double chief rabbinate of Israel with both an Ashkenazic and a Sephardic rabbi, there does not seem to be much hope left for Yiddish and Judesmo, especially in the Holy Lands.

However, there is an important community of Ashkenazi Jews in both Israel and the USA (though also in the UK), who do have Yiddish as their mother language nowadays. This is indeed the Hasidic community, as I have already remarked previously.

Seeing this, it can be easily noticed that, while a language was being revived and many people starting speaking it, other languages progressively declined as its speakers began to start speaking Hebrew while abandoning their traditional languages. This is something that personally shocked me when I first became aware of it. I had always regarded the revival of Hebrew as a highly honorable accomplishment but, realizing that this also involved the deterioration of the status of other languages, I had my doubts and became more reluctant when facing Hebrew and its supposedly remarkable triumph it is generally associated with.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Díaz-Mas, Paloma. *Los sefardíes: Historia, Lengua y cultura*, Barcelona: Riopiedras Ediciones, 1993.
- Gómez, Bravo, Gutmaro. *Atlas de la civilización judía*, Madrid: Editorial LIBSA, 2006.
- Lleal, Coloma. *El judezmo. El dialecto sefardí y su historia*, Barcelona: U. de Barcelona, 1992.
- *Sefardiweb*. CSIC. August 15th 2017 <http://sefardiweb.com>.
- A. Fishman, Joshua. *Never say die! A thousand years of Yiddish in Jewish life and letters*, the Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1981.
- A. Fishman, Joshua. *Yiddish in America: Socio-Linguistic Description and Analysis*, the Hague: Indiana U., 1965.
- Weinreich, Uriel. *College Yiddish: an introduction to the Yiddish language and to Jewish life and culture*, New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish research, 1995.
- *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., Macropaedia, volume 22, page 667, "West Germanic languages." Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990.
- *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., Micropaedia, volume 12, page 843, "Yiddish language." Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990.
- Bard, Mitchell G. "Ashkenazim." *Jewish Virtual Library* (1998): Setmber 1st 2017 <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ashkenazim>.
- Fishman, Joshua. *Never say die! A thousand years of Yiddish in Jewish life and letters*, the Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1981.
- Ferrer, Joan. *Hebreu: llengua, literatura, gramàtica*, Girona: U.de Girona, 2002.
- Ferrer, Joan. *MEMORIA Y PROYECTO DOCENTE. Plaza: Profesor titular de Universidad. U. de Girona. Área: Estudios Hebreos y Arameos. Perfil: Lengua hebrea y aramea*, Girona: Universitat de Girona, 2002
- Sáenz - Badillos, Ángel. *Historia de la lengua hebrea*, Sabadell: AUSA, 1988.
- Bard, Mitchell G. "Jewish Population of the World (1882 - Present)." *Jewish Virtual Library* (2016): September 15th 2017 <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-population-of-the-world>.