

Language Ideologies and Hegemonic Factors Imposed upon Judeo-Spanish Speaking Communities

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INTRODUCTION

This article explores Judeo-Spanish, the language of the (Jewish) Sephardim, which dates to the expulsions from the Iberian Peninsula in the 15th century. As this language has developed over the course of five centuries throughout the Ottoman Empire and cities within North Africa, a number of language ideologies surrounding its use have been fomented within Sephardic realms as well as those outside of them.¹ Today Judeo-Spanish, also referred to as Ladino² or Judezmo, is a language spoken primarily by older generations with pockets of speakers found all over the world. The language, however, is no longer being passed down to younger generations as a first language. Judeo-Spanish has undergone many language shifts over the past century depending on the location in which the language is/was spoken. These shifts from Judeo-Spanish to other languages can be best understood by looking into the language ideologies of the Sephardim and the greater non-Sephardic communities in which they reside(d). The latter mentioned communities are those that will be discussed as hegemonic institutions expanding their linguistic domination over smaller Judeo-Spanish regions. Due to the results of linguistic hegemony in the Judeo-Spanish communities described, it is possible to see a shift in the traditional Sephardic identity to one that encompasses national ideologies as a part of their own.

Judeo-Spanish speaking communities have coexisted with various linguistic populations throughout the world for centuries. These shared spaces have resulted in the formation of language ideologies based on factors such as the socioeconomic power and status of the speakers using a given language. While language shift and the

development of language ideologies are bound to occur when speakers of different tongues come into contact with one another, what makes the case of Judeo-Spanish unique is the fact that it has experienced a similar fate regardless of the community in which it has existed. In order to show how various nation-states have imposed national language ideologies on residing Judeo-Spanish speakers, I explore the situation within the United States, and use Turkey and Israel as points of comparison and historical reference. What is particularly curious is how hegemony has been exercised in the confines of these three nations, leading not only to the diminished use of Judeo-Spanish as the national language, but causing structural variations that the language developed due to hegemonic imposition in each nation-state. Such examination is important as current research tends to focus on Judeo-Spanish within a given community and often neglects cross-hemispheric comparison. Therefore, this paper offers a novel perspective on the parallel development of language ideologies associated with Judeo-Spanish across borders.

HEGEMONY AND LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY

A compelling force for the decline of Judeo-Spanish worldwide can be associated with the language ideologies of their respective nation-states. At the core of this phenomenon are hegemonic factors. Hegemony is described by Rampton as “the relation of domination and subordination and one’s assignment and shaping of perceptions of ourselves and the world” (49). Rampton’s article on hegemony, social class and stylization also fits within the Judeo-Spanish condition; hegemony is used to refer to relations of varying subgroups that are saturated by everyday national ideologies, thus affecting the lifestyle of Judeo-Spanish speaking communities. These communities experienced authoritative ideologies by prevailing national authorities with differing linguistic objectives for their state.

Multisidedness of nation making is a main theme discussed in Philips “Constructing a Tongan Nation-State” in which hegemony is described as “an ideological process by which state institutions produce/reproduce ideological consensus within citizenry” (231). As such, crucial sites are used by Philips to convey the sense that more important or powerful ideological work is being done in some forms of cultural activity than others. Similar hegemonic factors were in effect in the three nations discussed in this article. While Turkey and

Israel were reshaping their identity, the role of language and cultures changed drastically to fit into the broader national linguistic profile. To be Turkish became associated with speaking Turkish, and comparably, to be Israeli meant to speak Hebrew. Similarly, in the United States, the perception of prosperity in the country was reliant on speaking English. Turkish, Israeli and United States citizens became the driving forces in their respective nations in the implementation of hegemonic language ideologies among speakers of minority languages—in this case, Judeo-Spanish.

Judith Irvine offers an appropriate explanation of language ideologies, as she states that they are a “cultural (or subcultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (255). The relationship language ideologies have with political interests is, therefore, integral in assessing hegemonic factors in a given nation. Woolard discusses language variation and hegemony as a result of political power and control, along with economic and cultural identity (741). While Woolard looks into the case of Castilian vs. Catalan in Spain, similar connections can be made with Judeo-Spanish communities that have striven to hold onto their language despite linguistic identities of the greater communities within which they exist. The use of Judeo-Spanish under Ottoman rule was rather different from the times when independent nations began emerging throughout the first half of the 20th century. For centuries the Sephardim are said to have flourished in their communities and held onto their Judeo-Spanish language, which incorporated many lexical items depending on where they settled (Salonika, Istanbul, Sarajevo, Tetuan³, etc). As the borders of the Ottoman Empire changed in the early decades of the 1900’s, so did their respective language ideologies, particularly those of Turkey. Judeo-Spanish speaking communities began to face discrimination by national leaders as well as within their own groups in order to use the majority language wherever they lived. This reality, nonetheless, was common not only in minority groups, but also in those groups that had held onto a foreign tongue.

Similar to the situation within the Ottoman Empire, the independence of Israel in 1948 ultimately did not accommodate the various languages of the Jews, despite its establishment as the national homeland for the Jewish people. It should be noted that many Sephardim fled the Ottoman Empire for Israel in hopes of building the new state

and, thus, adding a new level of identity to their already enriched Sephardic one. However, because Israeli politics strongly urged that all Israeli citizens speak Hebrew, other languages were not tolerated. Ideologies were forming what it meant to be an Israeli, and at the core of belonging were those who spoke Hebrew. Since Hebrew was considered a 'dormant language,' those who did not speak it were encouraged to learn it so that they could pass it onto their children as a native language (Stavans 29). Israeli affairs were so focused on the revitalization of the Hebrew language that languages like Judeo-Spanish⁴ suffered and became less utilized throughout the nation. With a strong correlation exerted between national identity and linguistic representation, it is clear how powerful the role of language can be in a given society.

THE CASE OF JUDEO-SPANISH IDEOLOGY IN THE UNITED STATES

While the language ideologies of Judeo-Spanish communities in the United States during the first half of the 20th century are unique in comparison to those in Turkey and Israel, they still produced a similar fate. As the Sephardim in Turkey were confronted with ideologies between Judeo-Spanish and Turkish, the Sephardim of Israel between Judeo-Spanish and Hebrew, the Sephardim of the United States were exposed to ideologies among Judeo-Spanish and not only English, but (Modern) Spanish, Yiddish⁵ and Hebrew as well. After several centuries of primarily Ashkenazi⁶ immigration to the United States, the early 1900's experienced an increase of immigration by the Sephardim. With this immigration into the United States, the Sephardim were met with an abundance of newly formed language ideologies and contact with more dominant languages; these obstacles eventually caused language shift from Judeo-Spanish into one of these supplementary 'majority'⁷ languages.

While it appears that the Sephardim were pressured or even forced into learning Turkish or Hebrew in their respective countries, there was more willingness in America to learn English, as immigrants were motivated and eager to acquire the majority language upon their arrival in the United States. Accounts⁸ often show that the Sephardim wanted to learn English when they arrived in America, primarily because they wanted to 'fit in' and become a part of the greater society. Additionally, in order to advance in what was considered a country of opportunity, the Sephardim felt that it was essential to

learn English. Several of the leading Judeo-Spanish periodicals during the 1920's and 1930's advertised courses in English and encouraged the Sephardim to take advantage of such 'opportunities' (Ben-Ur 92).

Upon immigration into the United States, the Ashkenazim questioned the Sephardim regarding their authenticity as Jews. That is to say, the Ashkenazim, the majority population of Jews in America, could not understand nor were initially willing to accept the fact that a Jew might not speak Yiddish. For the Ashkenazim, speaking Yiddish was synonymous with being Jewish. Additionally, Ashkenazim often questioned the Sephardim due to their darker features and their lack of knowledge of what they perceived as 'Jewish' culture and traditions, which were actually specific to their Eastern-European heritage. For these reasons, the Sephardim were constantly being compared to the Ashkenazim, and went out of their way to prove that they were Jewish, and that their language was just as authentic of a Jewish language as was Yiddish (Stern 45).

One example that illustrates the language contact in the United States among the Judeo-Spanish speaking Sephardim with both Yiddish and English can be found in a rare booklet (1916) that was published as a supplementary guide to the Judeo-Spanish newspaper of New York City, *La Amerika* (1910-1925) by its editor Moise S. Gadol. This booklet entitled, "Livro de Embezar las Linguas Ingleza i Yudish" (*Book for learning the English and Yiddish languages*⁹), served as a guide to Sephardic waves of immigration. While the editor discusses immigration policy and practice within the United States in the introductory comments, this guide primarily serves as a multilingual resource for the Sephardim to communicate in either English or Yiddish. Furthermore, the guide contains a section "Egzamen por Devener Sudito Amerikano ("Exam For Becoming an American Citizen"), reviewing possible questions and answers that one may encounter upon taking their citizen test, in both Judeo-Spanish and English.¹⁰ One of the goals of this guide was to help the Sephardim assimilate within the greater confines of the United States in addition to receive acceptance from their Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi brethren. Another unique element of this guide is that the Rashi alphabet¹¹ is used not only for the lexical entries in Judeo-Spanish, which would be quite common, but also for the equivalent Yiddish translation as well as the phonetic transliteration of the corresponding English translation. This guidebook was advertised with sample pages in *La*

Amerika from the start of its publication in 1910 until its final year in 1925, noting that various editions had been published throughout the years. And while this guide may be seen to many as nothing more than a multilingual resource, it allows us to expose the innermost ideologies that surrounded the Sephardic society nearly a century ago in the United States.

When the Sephardim of the United States came into contact with other ‘Spanish’¹² speakers, many were amazed at how great numbers of ‘their’ people were living amongst them. Initially the Sephardim did not realize that there were so many communities where non-Jews spoke ‘Spanish’. The Judeo-Spanish periodicals in the early 1900’s published articles promoting the belief that Castilian, the Spanish that they did not speak, was more authentic and consequently encouraged the Sephardim to learn this particular vernacular. While the Sephardim were able to communicate in Judeo-Spanish with Castilian-Spanish speakers, it was prominently believed that they should learn/shift their language to that of this ‘modern’ Spanish in order to advance economically. In this case, not only was English a key element for economic prosperity, but Castilian-Spanish was also seen as a means to advance in one’s career, particularly in the cities of Los Angeles and New York (Ben-Ur 92).

CONNECTING LANGUAGE TO CULTURE

As Woolard notes of Castilian in Catalonia, the use of the ‘other’ language often brings about conflicting ideologies of widespread boundaries (742). The central issue here is language being used as a tool to dominate and transform the identity of a minority group. Turkish, Hebrew, and English have served as a means for each corresponding nation to not only impart a linguistically hegemonic transformation on the Judeo-Spanish language, but also to impose a new shaping of the Sephardic culture. While Catalonians have had overall success in maintaining their linguistic heritage despite great Castilian influence, Judeo-Spanish speaking communities have not been able to due to overpowering hegemonic control, particularly because they function without their own institutional support or power.

Simounet discusses the link between language and identity at length in the case of language choice and ideologies in Puerto Rico and Santa Cruz. Simounet states that the most important factor, if

not the only one, in which a cultural group bases his or her identity is that of the language used (628). This relation is often found in speech communities that are endangered, as in the case of the Arizona Tewa community. A prominent adage of this population “na:- bí hi: li na: -bí wowa:ci na-mu,” can be translated as “my language is my life (history)” (Kroskrity 104). According to this belief, the fundamental characteristic of their community is language. This relation, while at one point comparable to the Judeo-Spanish speaking Sephardim, cannot be held for most Sephardim today who have ‘lost’ their language.

Simounet further notes that, “the identity of the individual is produced as a result from interaction with other individuals in surrounding communities. The construction of identity, therefore, is the product of negotiation between various members of the speech community”¹³ (629). The Judeo-Spanish speaking communities within Israel and Turkey have adopted the national language as their primary vernacular, creating a revised Sephardic identity from the one that existed before the national recognition or the formation of either Turkey (1923) or Israel (1948). Callaway notes many of his Sephardic informants in Istanbul, Turkey as stating, “una lingwa es una persona en el meoyo (a language is a person in the mind)” (44). Similar to the Arizona Tewa adage mentioned above, Callaway explains that for many in the Turkish Judeo-Spanish community, language symbolizes culture and identity. He continues, “In this view, Sephardic culture cannot survive without Judeo-Spanish; the language has an intrinsic merit for the language itself is the vehicle of Sephardic culture” (44). For those who hold onto their language, Simounet’s correlation between identity and language can be applied to a number of Judeo-Spanish speakers.

Callaway’s research in Istanbul, Turkey shows that a popular saying during the early years of the Turkish Republic was “Vatandaş, Türkçe Konuş!” translated as “Citizen, Speak Turkish!” (29). The interpretation of this slogan throughout Istanbul varies, Callaway explains, as some informants note that this saying was seen as pressure to abandon minority languages, while others saw the slogan as a law, which outright banned the use of other languages. Kushner-Bishop, upon research on Judeo-Spanish revitalization in Israel, makes note of similar hegemonic pressure through public domains. One of Kushner-Bishop’s informants relates one such example of “peer pressure and

public slogans (Jew: speak Hebrew!) to encourage the use of Hebrew, the stigmatization of those who did or could not speak the language and acts of violence that forbade the use of other languages” (61). In his *Ladino Reveries*, Halio discusses the languages that have come into contact with Judeo-Spanish since the waves of Sephardic migration to the United States at the beginning of the 20th century. While Halio notes that children in Sephardic communities often used Judeo-Spanish, these second-generation Americans began to tell their parents, “Estamos en la Amerika. Si keresh adelentarnos aki, kale ke vos ambezesh a avlar en Inglese. And we did get ahead, but we also came apart (*We are in America. If you want to advance here, you must learn to speak English*)” (210). The curious part of the United States’ version of the ‘citizen, speak ‘X’ language’ credo is that it was often reinforced more emphatically by the Sephardic community members themselves. Ultimately, it appears that there were surely Sephardim in Turkey, Israel, as well as the United States who became advocates for taking on the national tongue and motivating others to do so as well in an effort to reap the benefits of pertaining to the larger nation-state.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN JUDEO-SPANISH

Irvine and Gal discuss hegemonized communities of one language who ignore the variety of cultures and, therefore, languages of minority groups. This can be seen in the United States Judeo-Spanish speaking communities of the early-mid 1900’s when the language was essentially forced out of all domains due to English, Spanish or Yiddish prevalence. The idea of erasure comes into play as surrounding ideologies prevalent in society made it so that the Judeo-Spanish communities were prone to becoming submerged into their larger linguistic society. Irvine and Gal define erasure as “the process in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible” (38). Therefore, anything that is not consistent with the larger hegemonic forces becomes stigmatized and falls out of usage. However, the role of erasure as described by Irvine and Gal takes on a different form in the Judeo-Spanish communities of Turkey, Israel and the United States, where these differences are explained as a particular form of erasure in which “ideological representation do not, however, necessarily mean actual eradication of the awkward element” (39). Instead of making the language entirely invisible, impositions on Judeo-Spanish

have resulted in structural modifications in the varieties spoken in each location to incorporate hegemonic linguistic features that each nation-state (in)advertently may have influenced.

Hegemonic practices by the nation-states discussed in this article demonstrate the influence over the Judeo-Spanish speaking communities that have led to various linguistic changes the language experienced over time. Sephiha notes that the Judeo-Spanish communities within Turkey adopted many loanwords as the push for its citizens to speak Turkish was underway (87). These loanwords became morphologically Hispanicized in that the base/ root of the Turkish word would be used in Judeo-Spanish followed by an *-ear* suffix, so as to appear more like 'Judeo-Spanish.' Examples include: *dayanmak* (to endure, Turkish) → *dayanear* (Judeo-Spanish), *eğlenmek* (to have fun, Turkish) → *englenear(se)* (Judeo-Spanish).

Romero explores the structural changes of Judeo-Spanish along a continuum of younger to older generations of speakers in Istanbul, Turkey. In his research, Romero examines morphological and syntactic changes that are occurring in Judeo-Spanish and associates them with the linguistic structure of Turkish so as to provide explanation for such changes. Of particular interest is what he terms the "reverse/backward transfer" effects of a second language (L2) on one's first language (L1) (121). In this case, Judeo-Spanish, as the mother tongue (L1) of many of his informants, has undergone structural changes due to Turkish becoming the dominant (L2) language in almost all domains. The structures analyzed in Romero's research include features of subject-verb agreement, subjunctive use, adjective placement, gender, and number (97). The results of this study coalesce with structural changes by speakers of Judeo-Spanish of other countries who are similarly influenced by their respective dominant languages.

In regards to the usage of Hebrew in Judeo-Spanish, language contact has been prevalent for centuries. Hebrew words were often used in the vernacular of the Sephardim, particularly in reference to religious content. Muñoz Jiménez discusses the increased use of periphrases and the syntactic structural relationship between Spanish auxiliaries and Hebrew words. Examples include: *ser maskim* (to remember), *azer*¹⁴ *heshbon* (to calculate), *azer teshuba* (to repent). In each of these examples the first word is historically from (Medieval) Spanish while the second is from Hebrew.

The English language also has influenced the structure of Judeo-Spanish in the United States, particularly from a phonological perspective. David Barocas is quoted to have noted, “In America, we have begun to form new Ladino-sounding verbs from the English language” (qtd. in Halio 30). Upon such a statement, one may wonder what exactly does it mean to be ‘Ladino-sounding’? According to Kushner-Bishop, “the retention of three sibilants, where in Modern Spanish only one remains, is perhaps the most pronounced phonological distinction today between Judeo-Spanish and Modern Spanish, not to mention the one most zealously guarded by Judeo-Spanish speakers” (41). These sibilants, /ʃ/, /z/, and /dʒ/,¹⁵ which have all been replaced in Modern Spanish to /x/, is found in a multitude of words adopted into Judeo-Spanish from the English language. Examples include: *enjoyar* (to enjoy), *frijide* (fridge), *shapear* (to shop), *gabish* (garbage), *trokojiko* (little truck), *pinajbodi* (peanut butter). An additional phoneme, /tʃ/ can be added to the list of prevalent phonological incorporations from English loanwords including *kaichi* (cottage cheese), *abechar* (to bet), *mech* (match), and *chugum* (chewing gum) (Halio 30). As seen in some of the previous examples, similar to Hispanized morphological endings from Turkish derived Judeo-Spanish verbs, English derived verbs also take on an *-ear* or *-ar* suffix, and are incorporated into the repertoire of the speaker.

Therefore, various structural differences have been incorporated in the Judeo-Spanish speaking communities depending on where the language is spoken. The examples provided above represent one of several linguistic peculiarities as found in Turkey (morphological), Israel (syntactic) and the United States (phonological).¹⁶ Loanwords and direct lexical borrowings¹⁷ are also used from the majority language in Judeo-Spanish, which often results in code-switching between the two languages.

CONCLUSIONS

Structural differences of contemporary Judeo-Spanish in Israel, Turkey and the United States can be attributed to hegemonic factors in each nation. Whether the increased use of these features (morphological, syntactic, phonological, lexical) of majority languages in which Judeo-Spanish speakers reside demonstrates changes in the overall Sephardic identity can be understood by further exploring the language ideologies situated in each setting. Therefore, according to Simounet’s

findings on the relationship between language and identity, the hegemonic influence and success that the nation-state has had upon the structure of the Judeo-Spanish language ultimately serves as evidence for a shifting of the Sephardic identity. This shift encompasses the land in which they live. Irvine and Gal discuss that multiple language use was “assumed to indicate multiple loyalties and thus a temperamental flaw, a lack of trustworthiness.” (65). While Irvine and Gal note that language was actually not a factor in the consortium of the Ottoman millet system (which categorized by religion), groups identifying by language, such as the Macedonians, were often forced to pertain to larger groupings instead of local practices and allegiances (65).

With newly formed constructs added to the Judeo-Spanish language, it may be said that Judeo-Spanish communities are shifting not only their language, but also their identity in order to fit into their respective hegemonic confines. We may also question, according to Irvine and Gal’s theory on multiple language use, whether the structural changes in Judeo-Spanish to incorporate elements of the national language can be seen as an attempt to appear more trustworthy and integrated both within and to their nation-state. These underlying factors, when analyzed from a linguistic perspective, may ignite inquiries, observations and ideologies as they relate to the language and identity of the Sephardim. With the recurrence of hegemonic ideologies that each nation-state has employed for its citizens to speak the majority language, Sephardim have been prone to incorporate such principles into their linguistic repertoire in a simultaneous reconstruction of both their Judeo-Spanish language and their Sephardic identity.

Notes

1. Bunis (1992) examines the linguistic peculiarities of Judeo-Spanish, categorizing the language into three distinct periods, each which can be further divided: Old Period (beginning of Jewish settlements in Iberia until 1492), Middle Period (1493-1810), and Modern Period (1811- present).

2. Sephiha (2012) notes that ‘Ladino’ only refers to the calque used by the Sephardim to transcribe liturgical writings using primarily Spanish lexicon, while maintaining the syntactic structure of Hebrew. The Judeo-Spanish vernacular, however, is a separate linguistic system of the Sephardim used for oral communication. The nomenclature of Judeo-Spanish continues to be debated, as many use the term Ladino for the spoken variety.

3. The Judeo-Spanish vernacular of cities throughout North Morocco, Haketia, advanced differently than the Judeo-Spanish dialects developing in the Ottoman Empire. Haketia has a much more significant admixture of Arabic, and as such, is considered a separate dialect under Judeo-Spanish dialectology.

4. Yiddish also suffered during this time, especially among secular groups. The situation of Yiddish, however, is unique due to ultra-orthodox communities who still transmit the language as a mother tongue to their children. See Avineri (2012).

5. Israel, of course, considered the possibility of Yiddish becoming the statewide Jewish language; however, the Zionist movement was closely associated with the revitalization of the Hebrew language. As such, Yiddish could not be considered a majority language over Judeo-Spanish in Israel since both languages were seen as minority languages to the creation of Modern Hebrew.

6. Ashkenazi refers to the Jews of Eastern European descent, while Sephardic refers to Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, ‘Sefarad,’ the land that makes up Spain and Portugal.

7. Majority is used here in reference to the linguistic hierarchy within a given society, and the politics at hand.

8. Personal interviews with Los Angeles and New York Judeo-Spanish speaking informants.

9. My own translation.

10. Within this section the Yiddish component/ translation was left out.

11. The Sephardim commonly used the Rashi alphabet, a variant of the Meruba (squared) Hebrew alphabet, in their printed materials. The Solitreo alphabet, however, was often the preferred orthographic cursive style of writing.

12. Sephardim often used the term ‘Spanish’ (espanyol, spanyolit, nuestro espanyol) to refer to their language, unaware that others who spoke a language similar to theirs may not be Sephardic Jews.

13. My own translation from “la identidad del individuo se forja como resultado de su interacción con los otros individuos de la comunidad que le rodea. La construcción de la identidad, por lo tanto, es el producto de una negociación entre los varios miembros de la comunidad de habla.”

14. Judeo-Spanish [azer], Latin American Spanish [aser], Peninsular Spanish [aθer]; English for ‘to do/ to make.’

15. Examples include Judeo-Spanish “disho” [diʃo] (s/he said), “ijo” [iʒo] (son), “djente” [dʒente] (people).

16. Linguistic structural changes pertaining to morphology, syntax and phonology can each be found within the three geographic locations of Judeo-Spanish described. The data provided serves to exemplify such changes, but is not an inclusive list.

17. I use Mahootian's (2006) definition of a loanword as fully integrated words that, "are recognized by the community as part of the native lexicon, and used as frequently and naturally as other native lexical items" (514). I also used Mahootian's description of a lexical borrowing to be the spontaneous of a word, "with no guarantee of recurrence," and that is not phonologically adapted to the host language like loanwords are (514).

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