

Linguistic Ideology in Şalom

Adrián Martínez Corral
Universidad de Granada

“The language question”, the debate about the several languages with which Sephardim were in contact, has been a recurrent topic for the Jewish press in Judeo-Spanish. In this paper we discuss the beliefs, conceptions and representations of several languages voiced in Şalom, a Judezmo newspaper published in Istanbul from 1947 onwards. We conclude that the different ideas expressed affected the structure and domains of use of all the languages employed by Turkish Jewry and led to the current linguistic landscape of the community.

Keywords: Sephardim, language ideology, Judeo-Spanish, Jewish press, language shift

Judeo-Spanish, the language spoken by the Sephardim Jews in the former lands of the Ottoman Empire, has not been traditionally held in high esteem by its own speakers. During the 19th century, when several attempts were made to modernize an impoverished and backward community, Judezmo was often dismissed as a jargon or as a corrupted language. It was deemed unfit to capture the essence of the modern world and was polluted by the unstoppable stream of loans and borrowings taken from concomitant languages. Although there was consensus on the pitiful state of Judeo-Spanish, there were different approaches to how to tackle this problem. On the one hand, there were those among Sephardic intellectuals who considered that Judeo-Spanish was already beyond redemption. They advocated its withdrawal and its substitution by a more prestigious language -such as Western languages like French or Italian- or by national languages like Bulgarian, Turkish or Serbo-Croatian in a time of growing nationalisms. On the other hand, another group of intellectuals believed that it could be saved through an appropriate face-lift with modern Spanish as a source of inspiration.

These conceptions about languages or linguistic ideologies, which followed Silverstein’s classic work, can be defined as “any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein, 1979, p. 193). They were voiced in several newspapers, where “La question de la lingua” became a recurrent topic of debate. Thus, David Bunis analyzes how “linguistic, cultural, social, and political influences emanating ultimately from Western Europe began to have profound effects on the Judezmo speech community and its members’ attitudes towards and use of the traditional language” (Bunis, 1996, p. 227). To sustain his analysis, Bunis reviews the Jewish press of the late Ottoman Empire and finds advocates for each of the stands: from those willing to abandon the communitarian language to advocates of its reformation.

Romero (2010) also delves into this topic, taking as main sources articles printed in *El Tiempo* and *La Epoca*, two newspapers published in Constantinople and Salonica at the turn of the 20th century. In addition to the different opinions regarding the language voiced in their pages, she also mentions the diverse ideas concerning the alphabet which should be employed, since many authors deemed switching to Latin characters from the traditional Rashi alphabet as the only way to modernize Judezmo. Burki (2010; 2013), studies two publications from Salonica, *El Avenir* y *La Epoca*, where the debate about the language persists among those in the latter, who defend Judeo-Spanish as the distinct feature of the Ottoman Sephardim, and those in the former who consider Hebrew to be the true language of the Ottoman Jewry. Curiously enough, both newspapers agree on encouraging its readers to learn Turkish, since such was the national language and speaking it their duty as Ottoman subjects. Burki (2016) also studies “La question de la lingua” in the American press and concludes that there is a widespread perception of the necessity of learning both English for practical and economic purposes, and Hebrew, as an ethnical and religious marker. However, these ideas do not mean that Judeo-Spanish should be dismissed; on the contrary, its speakers saw it as an asset and a useful tool to conduct business with the growing Hispanic community of New York.

Şalom

As we have seen so far, language has been a recurrent topic of the Sephardic press in Judezmo. In the next pages, we will delve into the archives of Şalom in order to observe which linguistic ideologies lie(?) -explicitly or implicitly- on its pages. Şalom is a newspaper composed mostly in Judeo-Spanish and has been published weekly in Istanbul from 1947 until today, although from 1983 onwards it switched completely to Turkish except for one page. This change took place when the first owner and director, Avram Leyon, was forced to sell it, given that a newspaper in Judezmo was no longer sustainable. By that time, there was a manifest lack of a potential audience (Martínez, 2016, p. 167), which had been provoked by the massive emigration that the Turkish-Jewish community experienced during the central decades of the 20th century and the process of language loss within the community. Starting in the 40s, more than 40,000 Turkish Jews left Turkey, mostly to relocate to the newly founded state of Israel (Shaw, 1991; Díaz-Mas, 2006). Parallel to this emigration trend, which was emptying the old Jewish quarters of Istanbul, the ethnic language was rapidly being substituted by Turkish in most domains. The intergenerational transmission mechanisms within the family were failing and “the generation born after 1960 indicated they mostly did not understand the spoken language, but only uttered a few words with their grandparents” (Seloni-Sarfati, 2012, p. 19). As a result, by 1983, Judezmo was only spoken by the elders in the community and it was no longer the quotidian language in the Jewish homes of Turkey. How all these changes can be observed in the pages of Şalom and the perceptions about languages voiced by its collaborators, is the goal of this presentation.

Attitudes Towards Languages

A piece that really captures the attitude towards languages among many of the Turkish Sephardim was published in the second issue of Şalom, dating back to November, 1947. In this article, which discusses language education in the Jewish High School Bene-Berit, the author regrets that many students demand being exempt from the study of Hebrew, considering that Turkish and French are enough. Judeo-Spanish is not even mentioned. Both French and Turkish are perceived as prestigious, useful languages worth studying by the Jewish youth. A positive light is also cast on Hebrew, which turns to be, in spite of the hyperbolic tone of the author, the feature that makes the Jewish school Jewish: if Hebrew is not going to be taught “es mijor de dizir ke non tenenos eskola Judia” [it is better to say that we do not have a Jewish school] (Şalom, 6/11/1947). Ironically, Judeo-Spanish, the language in which the piece is written, is not even taken into consideration and is dismissed without even being mentioned, despite still being a widely spoken language among the Turkish Sephardim of the time.

Hebrew

The attitudes in the article mentioned will continue to appear during the subsequent years in the pages of Şalom. Hebrew is, obviously, the language of religion, therefore pious Jews are expected to learn it as a part of their religious duties since “es un dover sakro çiko komo grande de embezar la lingua ebra” [it is a sacred duty to learn the Hebrew language] (Şalom, 13/10/1949). In several pieces it is labeled as the language of the Jews, the quality that invests them of their very Jewishness, understood as an ethnic category that transcends religion: “Embezate tu lingua: el ivrit, para ke puedas amostrar ke i tu sos Cudyo” [learn your language: Hebrew, so that you can show that you are a Jew] (Şalom 8/4/1948). During the years in which Şalom is published, Hebrew went from being a language confined to the sphere of religion and mastered by just a few, to become the national language of a newly founded state and spoken by the vast majority of its citizens. Therefore, in addition to the religious dimension, there is a nationalistic drive pushing Turkish Jews to learn Hebrew as a way to identify with the Jewish state of Israel. National and religious spheres collude in making Hebrew the lingua franca that every Jew should master, and efforts are made to “azer el Ebreo lingua principala de los judios del mundo” [make Hebrew the main language of the Jews of the world] (Şalom, 27/1/1965). However, reality is stubborn and, according to Altaveb’s research, only 13% of her informants truly mastered Hebrew, so we can conclude that “despite its highly symbolic value, Hebrew is not a daily language in the Turkish Jewish linguistic context” (Altaveb, 2003: 158).

Turkish

The situation regarding Turkish is very different. This was a language not widely spoken among Turkish Sephardim at the time when Şalom was founded, but which had become the first language of virtually all the members of the community when its publication was halted in 1983. During the first years of the newspaper, recurrent

advertisements could be found among its pages demanding, for instance, “un director o una direktrisa para eskola primaria Judia (...) konosiendo las linguas Turka I Franseza” [a director for a Jewish primary school who knows Turkish and French] (Şalom, 24/9/1953), which gives evidence that knowledge of the national language could not be taken for granted. According to Bali, “in the early years of the decade [of the 50s], the great majority of the Jewish community’s members had yet to adopt Turkish as their primary language and Ladino remained the main language of daily life, and this was only slowly giving way to Turkish” (Bali 2012: 51). A collaborator of Şalom states in a piece from 1948, that thanks to Atatürk’s language reform, “los 80 por syen a lo menos de nuestros ermanos se apatronaron byen de la lengua del payiz, i ke (...) va a venir un tyempo i non muy leşos, kuando la prensa turko-cudiya a ser enteramente en lingua turka” [at least 80% of our brothers learned well the language of the country and (...) a time will come, and not far, when Turkish-Jewish press will be entirely in Turkish language] (Şalom, 15/4/1948). Just a few years later, in 1953, another collaborator of the newspaper congratulates himself on the success of the “asimilasion i adopcion de la lingua i kultura Turka” [assimilation and adoption of the Turkish language and culture] (Şalom, 18/6/1953), just as their patriotic duty demands. Mastering Turkish is thus seen as a desirable goal towards which the community is working, especially among its youth. It is a proof of loyalty to the Republic of Turkey coming from a minority frequently under suspicion of not being patriotic enough due to their maintaining a foreign language -and a language from a country which was rater hostile towards them- and of their allegiance to Israel as a part of their religious duties and ethnic solidarity.

Along with this display of patriotism, a widespread idea among members of the community was that it was their duty to become fluent in the language of the country which hosted their ancestors in difficult times, “kuando nuestros avuelos arivaron de Espanya les avryo sus brasos, i eyos bivieros tanto orosos konservando sus uzos i mezmo la lingua de sus payis de provenensya” [when our grandparents arrived from Spain, it opened its arms and they lived happily maintaining their customs and the language of their country of origin] (Şalom, 12/5/1949). Therefore, “azer expandir la lingua Turka”. [make the turkish language expand] (Şalom, 12/5/1949) is but a sign of gratitude to their host country. This idea of linguistic gratitude towards the host nation is by no means new and can be traced back to newspapers dating from Ottoman times such as *El Avenir* or *La Época* -two Judezmo newspapers from Salonica published at the turn of the 20th century- which “promueven el aprendizaje del turco entre la población en un gesto de gratitud hacia la Sublime Puerta por haber acogido a los sefardíes tras la expulsión y por dejarlos vivir en sus territorios en paz, en una época en la que en Europa abundan las persecuciones antisemitas” (Burki, 2010, p. 84).

However, it would be rather naïve to believe that it was purely attraction factors that moved Turkey’s Jews to learn the national language without taking into account the coercive policies aimed at making minorities switch from a characteristic multilingualism to an imposed monolingualism (Bornes-Varol, 2013: 18). Such policies

were implemented during the 19th century by the late Ottoman Empire and by the newly founded Balkan states, so “Judeo-Spanish 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” (Kirschen 2013: 27). With the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, this pressure only increased, and minorities were subjected to the infamous campaign *Vatandaş Türkçe konuş!* – Citizen speak Turkish! in which those speaking any language other than Turkish were publicly singled out and, in some occasions, even fined for doing so. In spite of these campaigns being sporadic and exceptional, and of some members of the community “who maintained that, in a democracy, citizens were at liberty to speak whatever language they wanted at any decibel level they desired” (Bali, 2003: 51), they left a noticeable imprint on others. Periodically, a piece can be read in Şalom advising Turkish Jewry to maintain a low profile since “Al tanto de reservado estamos es mejor para todos nozotros” [the quieter we are, the better for us] (Şalom, 11/5/1963). This discretion included, obviously, speaking Turkish in the public sphere, from which it can be inferred that employing the national language by Turkish Jews was considered a way to conceal their ethnic and religious affiliation.

Eventually, these forms of pressure, along with the imposition of Turkish as a vehicular language in the totality of the education system (Altaveb, 2002, p. 97), made it become the daily language of the vast majority of the Turkish Sephardim and even overtake French as a language of prestige and sign of modernity (Bornes-Varol, 1982). In fact, not many opinions about French, a language in which most staff of Şalom were proficient, can be found among its pages. In a brief note Avram Leyon, director of the newspaper, criticizes those who “empesan a avlar en fransez, se imajinan ke estan avlando la lingua de Victor Higo mientras que ke se renden ridikül i devienen la burla de los otros porke en avlando en fransez keren darsen un ayre de megalomania” [start to speak in French, imagining that they are speaking Victor Hugo’s language, while they are just making a fool of themselves and become the laughing stock of the others because of their pretensions of megalomania by speaking French] (Şalom, 15/8/1073). Therefore, French is not only to take a secondary role, but it is occasionally characterized as a sign of snobbism. Ironically enough, this is made in a Judezmo deeply impregnated of French borrowings and loans, the product of decades of having this language as a model of distinction and sophistication.

Judeo-Spanish

With regard to Judeo-Spanish, the mother tongue of the Sephardim for centuries, the most striking thing might be its almost complete absence as a topic of debate from the pages of Şalom, at least during the first decades of publication. Therefore, when discussing for instance several aspects of the lives of the Jews of Yugoslavia (Şalom, 4/3/1959), the situation of multilingualism in Israel (15/7/1959), or writing about the language in which Turkish Jews in Los Angeles communicate among them (3/1/1952), Judezmo is not even mentioned. These absences suggest that, at least

during the first decades of the newspaper, the communitarian language is neither seen by the collaborators of Şalom as an identity marker nor as a bond between the Sephardim of the world.

One of the few occasions in which Judezmo is explicitly discussed is in a couple of pieces which aimed to respond to an article on Turkish Jewry, published in an Argentinian newspaper. In one of the pieces, the author expresses his certainty about the arrival of a time when “la jenerasyon venidera non va konoser del todo el jargon espanyol (...), kuando la prensa turko-cudiya va ser enteramente en lingua turka” [the next generation will not completely know the Judeo-Spanish jargon (...), when Turkish-Jewish press will be entirely in Turkish language] (Şalom, 15/4/1948). In the other article, the reporter admits that the style and language of the Turkish-Jewish newspapers is that of daily life and that such “jargon turko-judeo-espanyol ke avlamos es en grande parte fransizado (...) nozotros no pretendemos eskrivir en espanyol puro, en kastilyano” [the Judeo-Spanish jargon that we speak is greatly Frenchified, (...) we don’t pretend to write in pure Spanish, in Castilian] (Şalom, 20/5/1948). Both pieces, although obviously stating the particular opinion of their authors with regard to the communitarian language, also represent a set of widespread ideological tokens about it: that Judeo-Spanish is but a burden to be gotten rid of, that it is related to Spanish although distantly, and that it had been polluted by other languages, namely by French. Judezmo is not even regarded as a language in the eyes of its speakers but a “jargon”.

Given these ideas concerning Judezmo, it is no surprise that its number of speakers decreased dramatically, and that by the decade of 1960s the intergenerational transmission mechanisms of Judezmo were failing. Therefore, “Munços jovenes un jurnal judio meldar kerian ma la lingua jüdeo-espaniol no konosian” [many youths wanted to read a Jewish newspaper but they didn’t know Judeo-Spanish] (Şalom 25/10/1967), so a section in Turkish was started, which was aimed at these youths who were unable to speak Judezmo. However, voices can be found in Şalom raising the alarm about how “malorozamente nuestros uzoz, nuestros kostumbres, nuestras romansas, nuestras koplãs vienen de olvidarsen densiya en diya. Tambyen komo ya es byen savido el Cudeo-Espanyol” [unfortunately, our customs, our novels, our songs are being forgotten by the day. Also, as it is well known, Judeo-Spanish] (Şalom 8/12/1982). During the last decades of Şalom, this piece is not alone in vindicating the linguistic heritage of the Sephardim. Some collaborators even encourage its study, not only as a bridge to a rich communitarian past but invoking “la obligasyon de lavorar a ambezarnos esta lingua la kuala es la tresera del mundo” [the obligation to learn this language, which is the third in the world] (Şalom, 20/12/1978). Other pieces approach Judezmo as a subject, discussing “La historia i kultura del judaizmo Sefaradi” (Şalom, 15/11/1978), reviewing books such as “El teatro de los Sefardís orientales” (Şalom, 25/7/1980), or inform about academic conferences about the heritage of Sepharad under the title “Sefaradizmo i la fidilita a la Espanya” (23/6/1980). Therefore, from 1965 onwards, the traditional language of the Turkish Jewry is no longer a part of the quotidian landscape, a piece of the collective identity of the

Sephardim that, liked or not, could be taken for granted. Judeo-Spanish has but disappeared from Turkish-Jewish neighborhoods and has mutated instead into a subject for academic study, into an heirloom to be preserved, into an identity badge that can be held by those owning it; but it is no longer the vibrant, full of life language that it used to be.

Conclusion

Turkish Jewry has been, and still is, a group with an “heterogeneous ethnolinguistic character”, which “weakens any assumed tight correlation between language and ethnicity” (Altaveb, 2003: 38). We have observed the different ideas, beliefs and conceptions regarding the languages they come across as expressed in the pages of Şalom. “La question de la lingua” was still present during the second half of the 20th century, although it had lost some of its poignancy in the overwhelming monolingual context of the Republic of Turkey (as opposed to the multilingual nature of the late Ottoman Empire). All these linguistic ideologies have contributed to shape not only the internal structure of the languages of the Sephardim, but also their domains of use. Today, Turkish has become the mother tongue of virtually all Turkish Jews; French is still seen as a token of prestige and spoken by most among the best educated; Judeo-Spanish is currently practically confined to artistic manifestations, an object of conservation efforts such as the monthly newspaper *El Amaneser*, and a subject for academic study. Part of the ideas that have led to this situation are, as we hope to have demonstrated, present in the pages of Şalom.

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