Specters of Judeo-Spanish: The Case for Judeo-Spanish as a Partial Overlap of Idiolects Shared by People of Sephardi Culture

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to problematize the ontology of Judeo-Spanish qua language. First, I argue that its traditional conceptualization as an autonomous, self-contained language is predicated on a (flawed) classical ontological framework that relies on so-called 'named languages theory.' Second, I contend that a more enlightened understanding of Judeo-Spanish as a linguistic phenomenon necessitates a paradigm shift toward a hauntological framework consistent with theoretical models such as translanguaging and revivalistics. I conclude that Judeo-Spanish is best understood as an ensemble of the only partially overlapping idiolects of people who share a common Sephardi cultural/ethnic identity and who manage to communicate with reasonable success. Third, I discuss the momentous implications of this shift in three domains: linguistics, minority rights, and education.

Keywords

1   Pushing the Boundaries of the Classical Ontology of Judeo-Spanish[1]

What is Judeo-Spanish? According to the traditional scholarly literature on the topic (Papo 2021), Judeo-Spanish is a Romance language of Ibero-Ottoman nature 'preserved' during the Sephardi diaspora for over 500 years (i.e., since the expulsion of Iberian Jews between 1492 and 1499),[2] and nowadays classified by UNESCO as a "severely endangered language."

The vast majority of Judeo-Spanish linguists espouse this seemingly unproblematic understanding, devoting their efforts to documenting the 'language' and/or discussing its variegated glottonyms and linguistic ideologies. However, it is virtually impossible to keep revitalization efforts and discussions on Judeo-Spanish's name and ideologies separate from a problematization of the seemingly self-evident question with which we started this article: *What is Judeo-Spanish*? As remarked upon by Marcy Brink-Danan (2011), this question dates back to at least the 1880s, when it gave way to a subset of questions that were discussed in the Judeo-Spanish publication *El Tyempo*: "Is it a proper language? Is it modern? What should it be called? Should it be maintained? How should it be written (i.e., with what alphabet)?" (Bunis 1996:227, cited in Brink-Danan 2011:110).

The question *What is Judeo-Spanish*? is problematic because it contains a crucial unexamined assumption concerning the *existence* of Judeo-Spanish (namely, that *Judeo-Spanish is*). In addition, it focuses our attention exclusively on the *nature* of Judeo-Spanish (i.e., *how Judeo-Spanish exists*, *what it means to say Judeo-Spanish exists*). In doing so, "*what is Judeo-Spanish?*" primes us to both assume the very existence of Judeo-Spanish and neglect the intractable link between the existence and the nature of Judeo-Spanish (Pennycook 2020:360).

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2   Historically speaking, 'Judeo-Spanish' (also known as 'Judezmo') was the vernacular form of Ladino, which developed in the 13th-century Iberian Peninsula as a calque linguistic variety used in the translation of sacred texts for liturgical purposes. This custom of translating the Hebrew Bible word by word into the Iberoromance named language was known as *fazer en Ladino* ('to translate into Iberoromance'), hence the glottonym (Sephiha 1977). Nonetheless, this distinction between Ladino, on the one hand, and Judeo-Spanish/Judezmo on the other, has been gradually replaced by the interchangeable use of 'Ladino' and 'Judeo-Spanish.' Unless otherwise stated, in this article I will adopt the term 'Judeo-Spanish' as interchangeable with 'Ladino' to refer exclusively to the spoken vernacular.

Yet how are we to understand the ontological status of Judeo-Spanish? Can an entity exist outside an ontology framework? Is it even possible to envisage a linguistic theory that does not assume the existence of its object of study (a linguistic entity of some sort, such as a "language," a "dialect," and so on)? Remarkably, both possibilities are not just conceivable, but actually plausible.

1.1 *Can an Entity Exist Outside an Ontology Framework?*

Derrida's *Specters of Marx* was published in 1993 as a response to Francis Fukuyama's triumphalist certainty on the moral, economic, and political authority of Western capitalism and liberal democracies after the end of the Cold War, the demise of communism through the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), and the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union (1991). Derrida combined his deconstructivist approach with Marx and Engels's emblematic statement at the beginning of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848:112) that "a spectre [is] haunting Europe—the spectre of communism" to argue that with the demise of communism, the specter of Marx would become more relevant than ever.[3]

Within the context of this analysis, and as a successor to his earlier concepts of 'difference' and 'trace,'[4] he coined the neologism 'hauntologie' (*hantologie*), which comes from the conceptual fusion between 'haunting' (including both the French verb *hanter*—'to haunt'—and the term *hantise*, which refers to "the common sense of an obsession, a constant fear, a fixed idea, or a nagging memory" [Derrida 2012:224]), and 'ontology' (the philosophical study of

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3   "Instead of singing the advent of the ideal of liberal democracy and of the capitalist market in the euphoria of the end of history, instead of celebrating the 'end of ideologies' and the end of the great emancipatory discourses, let us never neglect this obvious macroscopic fact, made up of innumerable singular sites of suffering: no degree of progress allows one to ignore that never before, in absolute figures, have so many men, women and children been subjugated, starved or exterminated on the earth" (Derrida 2012:106).

4   First, *differánce* was coined by Derrida in 1963 (*Cogito et histoire de la folie*) and popularized from 1982 onwards (first in *Speech and Phenomena*, then *Différance*, and eventually *Positions*) to mean both 'difference' and 'deferral.' Contrary to the structuralist assumption, this concept implies that the relationship between signifier and signified is always incomplete, for there is always an element of deferral (i.e., of reference to other words and meanings) that disrupts this connection. Take, for instance, the word 'basketball.' Is it really possible to imagine its reference without picturing balls, nets, or jumps? Derrida's insight is that this chain of additional signifiers disrupts the type of straightforward relationship that makes meaning transparent in the structuralist paradigm. Much in this vein, the notion of 'trace,' which is influenced by psychoanalysis and appears in both *Writing and Difference* (1967, 1978) and *Of Grammatology* (1967, 1976), suggests that words are *haunted* by that which they do *not* mean, namely, that which is present and yet unseen, somewhere between the intentional and the accidental (Upstone 2017:316).

being or existence). The result was a hauntology, i.e., a productive problematization of the essentializing overtones that had hitherto characterized the classical ontological framework, which enables us to interrogate what is meant by 'being' and that which is said to exist.[5] Derrida's hauntology replaced the priority of being and presence with the ghost figure as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive, thus problematizing the supposed self-sufficiency of beings. As Fredric Jameson clarifies,

> spectrality does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist or that the past (and maybe even the future they offer to prophesy) is still very much alive and at work, within the living present: all it says (…) is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us (1999:39).

In other words, a hauntological understanding of Judeo-Spanish in terms of spectrality does not necessarily deny the *existence* of Judeo-Spanish (though it certainly does not affirm it in the ontological sense), but it definitely problematizes the *nature of that existence.*

If in the early 1990s the demise of communism paved the way for the emergence of hauntology, in the mid-2000s the widespread perception that the possibility of something new had died out within the popular culture of late capitalism motivated hauntology's 'second (un)life' (Fisher 2012) as an attempt to make sense of a time overwhelmed by a nostalgia for the pop-cultural artifacts of our recent past.

Drawing upon the hauntological readings of Derrida and Fisher, understanding Judeo-Spanish in terms of spectrality allows us to account for the complexity of its journey through time and space as manifested in its residual, traumatic, indeterminate, and virtual aspects, as well as for the connection between all four dimensions. First, residuality refers to that which is (in

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5 Predictably, Derrida does not present us with a well-defined theory of hauntology in *Specters of Marx* (or anywhere else, for that matter). Instead, and much in alignment with his post-structuralist style, this volume contains only three explicit mentions of the term where something akin to a working definition of hauntology can be discerned, which is not to say that the mentions in question are entirely consistent with each other (they are not). First interpreted in ontological and theological terms, then circumscribed to the performativity of our media landscape, and lastly theorized as intrinsic to every concept, in all its capaciousness, Derrida's notion of hauntology can be said to activate an enlightened understanding of many aspects that were obfuscated in the traditional ontology of several concepts, including that of (named) languages such as Judeo-Spanish.

actuality) no longer, but whose presence can still be felt. As stated above, this dimension is key to our comprehension of the many diasporic enclaves where 'Judeo-Spanish' is no longer used as a vernacular linguistic variety, but whose presence still resonates powerfully. These are often places haunted by trauma, a subtype of emotional residuality that converges with the latter in the "compulsion to repeat" (Fisher 2012:19), a fatal pattern. Third, quantum inde-terminacy designates a fundamental condition of existence for certain phe-nomena in which an isolated quantum system, such as a free electron, does not possess fixed properties until observed in experiments designed to measure those properties (Wallace 2021:93–132). Much like Schrödinger's proverbial cat, whose aliveness or death cannot be determined a priori, from the metaphori-cal lenses of quantum indeterminacy, 'Judeo-Spanish,' whose death has been prophesied for much of its life (Harris 1994), can be said to be neither alive nor dead until it is observed, depending on when, how, under what circumstances, and which participants express that observation in institutional, scholarly, and/or popular discourses apropos this linguistic entity. Thus, qua specter and much to the chagrin of purists, 'Judeo-Spanish' can hardly be claimed to belong to the order of knowledge. To say it with Derrida (2012:5; emphasis in original):

> *It is* something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it *is*, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge. One does not know if it is living or if it is dead. Here is—or rather there is, over there, an unnamable or almost unnameable thing: something, between something and someone, anyone or anything, some thing, "this thing," but this thing and not any other, this thing that looks at us, that concerns us [qui nous regarde], comes to defy semantics as much as ontology, psychoanalysis as much as philosophy.

Lastly, virtuality designates both that which has not yet happened in actual-ity but is already effective in the virtual (anticipation), as well as the digital realm. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the latter has witnessed the pro-liferation of Judeo-Spanish-speaking home-lands that can serve as an *Ersatz* of the many physical territories historically inhabited by sizable communi-ties of 'Judeo-Spanish' speakers. This phenomenon has been supplemented by the inclusion of the widespread use of 'Judeo-Spanish' as a means of

communication, the empowerment of Sephardi Judeo-Spanish speakers, the dynamism of digital interaction paradigms, the affordances of multimodality, the gradual change in the ideological valuation of 'Judeo-Spanish' as a reality of the twenty-first century, the constant amelioration of the digital generation gap (e.g., 'Judeo-Spanish' apps, digital archives, and online classes), and last but not least, the admirable technological innovation developed by the global diasporic community of 'Judeo-Spanish' speakers during the COVID-19 pandemic (digitalization of Judeo-Spanish-only newspapers, Zoom boom [Kushner 2020]) (Yebra López 2021:113). In these digital platforms, speakers who acquired so-called 'Judeo-Spanish' via home-based intergenerational transmission coexist with others who learned so-called 'Judeo-Spanish' from the former (online or otherwise, but no longer from earliest childhood and/or as part of the same family unit). As a result, 'Judeo-Spanish' becomes a real imaginary space premised on nostalgia as much as on imagination, i.e., developed on the basis of the languaging their users evoke and recall, but also emulate, creating "new authenticities,"[6] and standard(ization)s.

Fisher's discussion on the rearticulation of hauntology through an ever-expanding archive of the recorded past stresses the importance of community-based digital archives oriented towards the revitalization of Judeo-Spanish, such as *Ladino 21* (2017–). Founded by myself, Alejandro Acero Ayuda, and Sephardi author Benni Aguado, *Ladino 21* enables speakers of 'Judeo-Spanish' worldwide to document their diaspora through interviews, stories (including folk tales), academic presentations, jokes, readings, songs, theater plays, and Judeo-Spanish apps (Yebra López 2021:113).

In sum, from the viewpoint of a hauntological approach to 'Judeo-Spanish,' the essence and nature of this linguistic variation are not a puzzle to be solved; they are the structural openness or address directed towards the living by the voices of the past of 'Judeo-Spanish' or the not-yet-formulated possibilities of its future. 'Judeo-Spanish''s essence and nature is not unspeakable because it is taboo, but because it cannot be articulated in the terms available to us in the classical ontological framework. By contrast, Derrida's hauntological approach allows us to account for the complexity of its journey through time and space as manifested in its residual, traumatic, indeterminate, and virtual aspects, as well as for the connections among all four dimensions. This results in *a more enlightened (i.e., multidimensional) understanding of a different (i.e., haunto-logical) reality.*

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6   In this sense, Ruth Gruber coined the term "virtually Jewish" to describe how non-Jews imagine the so-called "Jewish space" in Europe (2002) (see also Gruber 2009:488).

In our time, hauntology has clearly outgrown its creator, who did not live to see the culmination of its 2+ "(un)lives" (Fisher 2012:16), by which I mean, the time after the host of renewed interpretations or "second (un)life" (Fisher 2012:16) of hauntology as an approach (which Fisher situates in the mid-2000s), deemed an "unlife" by virtue of the ethereal aspect of hauntology (which prevents it from having a clear beginning and end, unlike physical, ontological lives). As a result, qua approach hauntology keeps returning time and again in unexpected and unforeseen fashions, places, and times. Crucially for this article, as discussed by Stefen Craps's: "traditional scholars do not believe in ghosts: they maintain an ontological perspective, drawing a sharp distinction between the living and the non-living, being and non-being, the past and the present" (2010:468). This belief can and ought to be nuanced by a new scholarly trend discussing and/or adopting hauntology as an academic approach (Bozalek et al. 2021; Coverley 2020; Rahimi 2021; Shaw 2018), thus seemingly heralding Derrida's prophetic talk about the coming of "the 'scholar' of the future" (12), who, unlike his or her predecessor, would be capable of "thinking the possibility of the specter" and of "having commerce with the *revenants* and *arrivants* of history" (176) (cited in Craps 2010:468).

1.2 *Is it Even Possible to Envisage a Linguistic Theory that Does Not Assume the Existence of its Object of Study (i.e., a Linguistic Entity of Some Sort)?*

In the 21st century, a number of authors (Heller 2007; Jørgensen et al. 2011; Makoni & Pennycook 2007) have adopted the label "named language"[7] to argue that what the scholarly tradition has conceptualized as "languages" (e.g., 'English,' 'Spanish,' 'Judeo-Spanish') cannot actually be defined in the strictly linguistic terms of a fixed grammar, understood as "a set of essential lexical or structural features" (Otheguy et al. 2015:286). The following paradox ensues: languages are not linguistic objects, i.e., "not something that a person speaks," but socio-political constructs "tightly associated with established peoples or nations, and often additionally with established or aspiring states" (Otheguy et al. 2015:286). As a named language, the existence of 'Judeo-Spanish' has been traditionally contingent upon ontological statements made based on the ethnic, social, or political affiliation of its speakers, i.e., 'Judeo-Spanish' as the "language" of the Sephardi nation and a "minority language" in places like Israel, Bosnia, and France (Abramac 2019).

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7 Discussion of the label in question dates back to the second half of the 20th century. For its examination from an integrational linguistics approach, see Lieb 1983.

In the 21st century, 'Judeo-Spanish''s acute territorial dispersion/isolation and digitalization have exacerbated its perceived ethnolinguistic character as not only that which allows Sephardim to communicate but also the very glue that holds together the community of members of the global Sephardi diaspora. Michal Held (2010:83–84) has summarized this predicament as follows:

> The new Sephardi courtyard forming on the Internet is based primarily upon the ethnic language: the vehicle for the recreation of a fragmented offline personal and collective Sephardi identity. Thus, a replacement for the Sephardi homeland (or rather the system of homelands that Sephardi Jews yearn back to, such as Eretz Israel and Jerusalem, Spain, the Ottoman Empire, the State of Israel–to name just a few) is being constructed.

Additionally, and as identified by Brink-Danan, at times of socio-technological change, a number of concerns recur about Ladino: the glottonym, the transcription system, and the linguistic (i.e., orthographical and lexical) items that are legitimate in Judeo-Spanish and/or integral to it (Bunis 1996:237, cit. in Brink-Danan 2011:110).

Linguistically speaking, however, so-called 'Judeo-Spanish' (or any other named language, for that matter) is, from the theoretical lenses of translanguaging (García 2013; García & Wei 2014; Otheguy et al. 2015), a partial overlapping of idiolects (i.e., an individual's unique *-idio-* variety and/or use of language *-lect-*) which cannot be defined in strictly linguistic terms, that is, exclusively in a clearly-identified set of lexical or structural features.

In the next section, I will explore the momentous implications of adopting a spectral turn consistent with theoretical models such as translanguaging (García 2013; García & Wei 2014; Otheguy et al. 2015) and revivalistics (Zuckermann 2020) to conceptualize Judeo-Spanish as a partial overlapping of idiolects in three domains: linguistics, minority rights, and education.

2   Implication for Linguistics, Minority Rights, and Education

2.1   *Linguistics: Not a 'Language,' but a Partial Overlapping of Idiolects*
Adopting a hauntological framework on Judeo-Spanish allows us to deconstruct, first of all, the lexical and structural essentialism underpinning the traditional scholarly understanding of Judeo-Spanish as a 'language'. Such deconstruction challenges both the classical demarcation of 'Judeo-Spanish' in

grammatical terms, as well as the 'language' conceptualization that prevails in many scholarly and educational efforts to 'preserve' and 'teach Judeo-Spanish' as a 'minority' 'language.' In this section I will deal with the former challenge, discussing its implications.

2.1.1 'Judeo-Spanish' Is an Ensemble of Overlapping Idiolects of People Who Share a Common Sephardic Cultural/Ethnic Identity

The anti-essentialism underpinning the hauntological (as opposed to ontological) approach to 'Judeo-Spanish' can now be translated into the field of linguistics through the theoretical model of translanguaging. Originally coined by Cen Williams in the 1980s as a pedagogical practice within the context of Welsh education (Lewis et al. 2012), this theoretical model was then expanded to refer to both discursive practices and the pedagogies that build on them, as well as how these serve to empower minoritized speakers (García 2009).

The basic tenet of translanguaging is not so much that communicative practices cannot be defined linguistically, but that grammars constitute part of the repertoire of communicative resources upon which language users draw to negotiate meaning in their interactions. In recent years, Ofelia García and others have focused on the implications of this shift when it comes to problematizing the inaccuracy, essentialism, and unfairness that characterize the classical ontological framework on so-called 'languages' (García 2013; García and Wei 2014; Otheguy et al. 2015).

In particular, these authors have drawn attention to the extent to which 'languages' (e.g., 'Spanish,' 'English,' or 'Judeo-Spanish,' for that matter), which are best understood as 'named languages' (since they are sociocultural constructs, rather than pre-existing entities in the world out there), cannot themselves be defined exclusively in linguistic terms, that is in grammatical (lexical or structural) terms. Instead, 'languages' are collections of the only partially overlapping idiolects (those idiolects featuring a unified lexico-structural repertoire) of people who share a common cultural/ethnic identity and who manage to communicate with relative success (Otheguy et al. 2015:294).

For this article, the above means that 'Judeo-Spanish' is best understood not as a 'language,' but as an ensemble of the only partially overlapping idiolects of people who share a common Sephardi cultural/ethnic identity (i.e., that of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492) and who manage to communicate with relative success.

The adoption of a translingual perspective on Judeo-Spanish as informed by the implementation of a hauntological framework yields several additional radical implications in linguistics:

2.1.2   The Inability of Structural Linguists, i.e., Researchers Specializing in Lexicon and Structure, to Adjudicate 'One-Language-or-Two' Disputes

This undermines both the colonial claim that 'Judeo-Spanish' is a 'dialect' of 'Spanish' and the postcolonial/decolonial affirmation that 'Judeo-Spanish' and 'Spanish' are two separate 'languages.'[8] As demonstrated by Bunis (2016:329–331), members of the Ladino-speaking community (the vast majority of whom are not formally trained in linguistics) regularly give clear, if mutually conflicting, answers to the question of whether Judeo-Spanish is a 'dialect' of Spanish or a 'language' in its own right. Whereas Rachel Amado Bortnick (founder of the pioneering email list *Ladinokomunita*), from Izmir, has stressed the need to "*distinguir entre muestra lingua i la ke avlan los de Espanya i las Amerikas*" ('distinguish between our language and that which those from Spain and the Americas speak') (Ladinokomunita 2013, cit. in Bunis 2016:329), Benni Aguado, a very active speaker from New York, has claimed that "Ladino [...] is basically a dialect of Spanish from the fifteenth century" (Ladinokomunita 2013, cit. in Bunis 2016:330).

Contrary to the above intuitions, the adoption of a translingual perspective implies that there is no lexical or structural basis for deciding whether 'Judeo-Spanish' and 'Spanish' count as instances of the same 'language' or different 'languages.' Thus, even though laymen regularly give clear answers to one-language-or-two disputes (as seen above in the case concerning the relationship between 'Judeo-Spanish' and 'Spanish'), ultimately, researchers of the grammatical properties underlying the speech of individuals have no theoretical grounds on which to settle disputes about the separability and nameability of 'Judeo-Spanish' and 'Spanish,' since these are cultural, social, and political matters that pertain to 'Judeo-Spanish' and 'Spanish' as named languages. Linguists can discuss the historical and cultural factors that prevent an easy settlement on whether 'Judeo-Spanish' and 'Spanish' are two different 'languages.' They can also play the role of citizen advisors on debates relating to language names and boundaries (Yebra López 2020), but *qua linguists* (i.e., researchers of lexicon and structure) they cannot weigh in with a technical position on the issue at stake (Otheguy et al. 2015:287–88).

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8   For a critical examination of the political invention of 'Spanish' as a "modern" colonial language, the subsequent development of postcolonial pan-Hispanic and Hispanophone linguistic ideologies (postcolonial in the sense of aiming towards the cultural dependence of former Spanish colonies after these have achieved political independence) and consideration of decolonial strategies (that is, seeking to foster the cultural/linguistic independence of these colonies vis-à-vis contemporary Spain/'Spanish'), see Yebra López 2022.

From a linguistic perspective, structural linguists can only concern themselves with each participant's unique, personal 'language' (their 'mental grammar')[9] as manifested through their structured lists of lexical and grammatical features and subdivided in the latter's components (lexicon, phonology, morphosyntax) and subcomponents (clitics, tenses, etc.) (Corr & Yebra López 2020; Kurtz 2022). This remains the case even when 'Judeo-Spanish' structural linguists confusedly use this named language (including further glottonyms, paramount amongst which is 'Ladino,' but also *'Judezmo,' 'espanyolit'*)[10] to report on their findings (Corr & Yebra López 2020; Kurtz 2022), because these categories are not linguistic, but sociocultural, and thus fall beyond the scope of their analytical endeavors (Otheguy et al. 2015:287–88).

Additionally, their findings prove that contrary to the expectations of many speakers and/or participants, how each of their own respective idiolects differ is linguistically relevant, since they imply underlying structural differences in their mental grammars understood as "structured but unitary collections of features" (Otheguy et al. 2015:281). These differences in participants' speech who are presumed to be speaking the same named language, 'Judeo-Spanish,' are predicated upon lexical or structural differences in their idiolects (Otheguy et al. 2015:290). This diversity is particularly acute in the case of diasporic communities of speakers (such as the one at hand), whose members tend to possess larger and more complex linguistic repertoires as a result of their itinerancy. In turn, this heterogeneity leads community members to purifying attempts to claim linguistic unsulliedness across time (history) and space (geography), as documented apropos platforms such as *Ladinokomunita* (Brink-Danan 2011:115–7). However, these efforts, which heavily rely on the traditional essentialist demarcation of 'Judeo-Spanish' in grammatical terms, are both counterproductive to promote the 'language' (Brink-Danan 2011:116; Zuckermann 2020:209) and inaccurate from a linguistic perspective.

While there are undoubtedly large areas of overlap among the idiolects of people who communicate with each other in so-called 'Judeo-Spanish,' from this we should not surmise that qua named language 'Judeo-Spanish' constitutes a lexically or structurally based category. The reason is that such overlap is not coterminous with the boundaries that the sociocultural category 'Judeo-Spanish' supposedly serves to demarcate. The overlap in question is a

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9   This concept was popularized by Noam Chomsky (1957) within the context of generativism, which regards linguistics as the examination of a hypothesized innate grammatical structure.

10   See n. 2.

necessary condition (but not a sufficient one) for the establishment of externally named boundaries, which ultimately are predicated on the right social and historical conditions (Otheguy et al. 2015:290–291). Ultimately, and as observed by Brink-Danan apropos *Ladinokomunita*, heteroglossic reality pre-exists (and arguably motivates) any subsequent boundary-setting attempts: "by delimiting the possible topics for discussion, as well as the language to be used online, LK's members do boundary work that otherwise would leave blurred edges and an undefined community, or alternatively, a group of post-vernacular Ladino aficionados" (2011:113).

For instance, many of the words that myself and Alejandro Acero Ayuda (co-director of *Ladino 21*) know and use are also known and used by some of our acquaintances from Spain and Latin America that have some background in Sephardi Studies: *kavod* 'honor,' *mashallah* 'God has willed it,' *decir* 'to say,' *prove* 'poor,' *mano* 'hand,' *hoy* 'today,' *tener* 'to have,' *haverim* 'friends, colleagues,' *lista* 'list,' *comprar* 'to buy,' *tresalir*(*se*) 'to be excited, to lose one's mind,' *charshi* 'market,' *leer* 'to read.' Presumably, in our conversations with other colleagues and friends these words are common and they often appear in the same sentence. When they do, some people may say that this is a case of 'mixing' Spanish and Judeo-Spanish words, or of code-switching, which is exactly how it looks from an outsider's perspective. But from our own perspective, i.e., that of the speakers, all these words refer to our respective idiolects, not to the 'Spanish' or 'Judeo-Spanish' 'languages' as nationally or culturally defined. From the insider's view, which is a hauntological one, the ontological question of which words belong to Judeo-Spanish and which ones belong to Spanish (and which ones to both) cannot be asked meaningfully. A question formulated about Judeo-Spanish qua named language, i.e., as a "cultural object defined by place, memory, identity, history and of course, a socially given (though sometimes contested) name," (Otheguy 2015:291) cannot be answered in reference to each of our respective idiolects, which exist prior to the ontological introduction of distinctions between Judeo-Spanish and Spanish understood as self-contained, autonomous, discrete entities that "forcefully shoehorn speaker's linguistically unique idiolects into cultural over-determined language categories"[11] (Otheguy 2015:291).

As Otheguy et al. conclude (2015:291):

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11   See Otheguy et al. (2015:291) for a similar discussion of the linguistic repertoire used by García and Otheguy, which is likewise sometimes conceptualized from an outsider's perspective as a 'mixture' of 'English' and 'Spanish.'

> Languages (…) are groupings of idiolects of people with shared social, political or ethnic identities that, once so grouped, are described using linguistic terms that tend to give the mistaken impression that the grouping was based on linguistic grounds in the first place.

However, when Acero Ayuda and myself conduct interviews for *Ladino 21* or participate in the *Enkontros de Alhad* (a Ladino-only online interview show), we monitor our speech to be sure we only use the words of our idiolect that our interviewees tend to know and use. For instance, we use *meldar* and *charshi*, but not *leer* and *mercado* (their equivalents in so-called 'Spanish.')

Lastly, in principle the representativity of the above example could be problematized by arguing that neither myself nor Acero Ayuda are Sephardi, native, or heritage speakers. However, the staunch defense of 'Judeo-Spanish'-speaking "nativeness" and/or Sephardic ethnicity as proof of authenticity, legitimacy, and/or proficiency (and thus representativity) as a 'Judeo-Spanish' speaker, which is generously echoed in fora such as *Ladinokomunita* and *Los Ladinadores*, is contradicted by two fundamental aspects. First, by the realization that authenticity (whether couched in nativeness, heritage, or ethnicity) does not have an intrinsic, self-evident meaning, but it is instead the result of a process of authentication that is, in turn, socially negotiated and defined:

> rather than asking what is authentic, we should ask what it means to be authentic in a particular setting, according to what norms, and what are the authenticating practices by which it [authenticity] is conferred or denied. We should pay attention to how speakers use the notion of authenticity, to what ideological ends, through which authenticating practices.
>
> CREESE ET AL. 2014:939

Second, even if we were to agree on nativeness, ethnicity, or heritage as proof of representativity, the statistics tell a different story: Brink-Danan (2011:113) cites the responses to an online survey from 2001 that asked participants whether they spoke Judeo-Spanish as their "*lingua materna*" (mother tongue), and only 11% answered in the affirmative. This finding is consistent with the idea that the authenticity of Ladino (and ultimately, the speech community itself) cannot so much be *described* in accurate terms as *performed* in idealized fashion by resorting to ethnic and linguistic stereotypes conducive to the suppression of an otherwise heteroglossic reality. In other words, from a

strictly linguistic perspective, Ladino as an entity cannot be delimited along the lines of a (flawed) classical ontological framework that relies on standard language ideology. This in turn justifies my proposed transition to a hauntological approach based on the readings of Derrida and Fisher which allows us to understand 'Judeo-Spanish' in terms of spectrality, particularly with regard to its virtual dimension as pertains to the presence of 'Judeo-Spanish' in the digital realm (see section 1.1.), where as stated above and illustrated by my discussion of LK's prescriptivism, 'Judeo-Spanish' becomes a real imaginary space premised on nostalgia as much as on imagination.

2.1.3 Nobody Speaks 'Judeo-Spanish'

Given that a named language is a collection of the only partially overlapping idiolects of people who share a common cultural/ethnic identity (and who manage to communicate with relative success), and given that the idiolects that comprise a named language are all ultimately different, it follows that no one really speaks a named language. Or, if you will, nobody speaks Judeo-Spanish. For, as I have argued, the list of shared features of any two speakers that society deems as belonging to the same named language (Judeo-Spanish) is hardly likely to correspond to the same set; each speaker-dyad, regardless of how close the relationship in question might be (relatives, friends), most likely corresponds to a slightly different set (Otheguy et al. 2015:294).

Moreover, the common features that are perceived to be shared by idiolects emerge only after the idiolects have been stipulated on cultural grounds to belong to the same named language. In other words, linguists cannot discover (and so they have not) which specific features constitute the 'Judeo-Spanish language' or the 'Spanish language,' or any other 'language,' by starting ex novo. First, they need to be told whose idiolects count as 'Judeo-Spanish,' e.g., that the idiolects of some people living in Israel and Turkey are to count but that those of most people living in Spain are not. Only after that can linguists identify and explain the lexical and structural features that are common to those idiolects of 'Judeo-Spanish' (Otheguy et al. 2015:294).

2.1.4 We Can Continue to Use Terms such as 'Judeo-Spanish Speaker' and 'Judeo-Spanish,' albeit Strategically and with some Caveats

The above notwithstanding, because I remain cognizant of the importance of the scholarly, political, and sociolinguistic distinctions between 'Judeo-Spanish' speakers and 'Spanish' speakers, I am not simply abandoning that distinction or the concepts of 'Judeo-Spanish speaker' and 'Spanish speaker,' respectively. I continue to talk in some situations about 'languages' and even about a

particular 'language' (as in the label *Ladino 21*). Moreover, I acknowledge that these notions entail significant consequences in the lives of many people, not least Sephardim as a minoritized group (Otheguy et al. 2015:293).

However, there is a crucial difference between these two usages: whenever I speak of idiolects, I do so *coherently* and from an insider's perspective. By contrast, whenever I talk selectively about 'languages' and even about a particular 'language' I do so *strategically* and/or from an outsider's perspective.

When I say that I 'speak Judeo-Spanish,' I am admitting to the fact that my idiolect partially overlaps with those of other speakers who all think of themselves as 'Judeo-Spanish speakers,' and who count me as part of that "imagined community" (Anderson 1983). The same holds when I say that I 'speak Spanish.' Yet at the same time, I am mindful that, in strategically accepting terms like 'language,' 'a language,' 'monolingual,' and 'multilingual,' 'Judeo-Spanish speaker,' 'Spanish speaker,' and as discussed by Otheguy et al. (2015:293), I am using categories that do not correspond to individuals from the viewpoint of their own internal linguistic perspective, categories that do not map onto the billions of the world's idiolects, the latter belonging to the "linguistically unnamed and socially undifferentiated mental realm" (Otheguy et al. 2015:293). When it comes to the concept of 'Judeo-Spanish' as a named language, I am not denying its existence; rather, I am restricting it to its proper domain of discourse, i.e., that of the ontological, which can only be problematized and supplemented from a hauntological perspective that transcends it in meaningful ways.

Since 'Judeo-Spanish,' 'Judeo-Spanish speakers,' and related terms are socially defined, they are appropriate and legitimate to discuss social identity and sociolinguistic behavior (Otheguy et al. 2015:293). With two caveats. First, that we remain aware that the named language category 'Judeo-Spanish' has historically been articulated for social purposes that are linked to the imposition of political power, as well as challenges to it, and the identification of a minoritized group. Second, that we do not deploy this label to discuss mental grammar and/or lexical and structural features, because named languages cannot be reduced to either.[12] The conceptualization of language use as

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12   It follows from this that trying to make grammatical comparisons between the group of idiolects referred to as 'Judeo-Spanish' and that referred to as 'Spanish' would amount to incurring lexical and structural essentialism. Let us imagine, for the sake of the argument, that somebody tries to draw a line between 'Judeo-Spanish' and 'Spanish' by claiming that 'Judeo-Spanish' often omits the initial *h* compared to the use of initial *h* in current 'Spanish' (e.g., *ijo* vs *hijo 'son'*), and prefers the world "meldar" (vs. "leer") for 'to read.' First, this is a form of circular argument, because it presupposes that which is trying to

translanguaging, then, is to be deployed judiciously, whenever interlocutors feel the need for, and become invested in, theoretical coherence, but it can be put aside when strategic concerns become most pressing (Otheguy et al. 2015:298).

2.1.5 We Can Finally Focus on the Speakers' Idiolects and Actual Linguistic Behaviors

The distinction between treating speakers as individuals, on the one hand, and treating them as members of a socially defined category, on the other, is that of treating their speech in terms that uniquely pertain to each of these individuals (as emphasized by translanguaging), and describing them in terms of external societal criteria (which is the only possible conceptualization within the classical framework of language ontology), respectively (Otheguy et al. 2015:296).

Translanguaging becomes most helpful when we want to look beyond social categories and account for the speakers' idiolects and their real linguistic behaviors, i.e., their actual language practices. Failing to do so results in considerable confusion, to the detriment of the speakers with whom we work (Otheguy et al. 2015:298). As Otheguy et al. (2015:287) conclude: "we ignore the two senses of language at great intellectual peril to ourselves, and at enormous practical peril to the populations whose linguistic and educational practices we research and whose interests we aim to protect."

2.2 *Revitalizing 'Judeo-Spanish' as a Minoritized Collection of Idiolects*

In the previous section, I discussed how articulating a hauntology of 'Judeo-Spanish' from the theoretical lenses of translanguaging implies challenging

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prove, i.e., that languages exist as objective entities. Conversely, if all we have are partially overlapping idiolects, it follows that those never fully coincide, thus not allowing us to make essentialist claims about a specific named language being exclusively definable by the inclusion of concrete lexical and structural features. Second, this observation points to the existence of a *positive correlation* (i.e., 'it is often the case that x named language is accompanied by the use of Y and Z lexical/structural features), not a *necessity*. Therefore, to the extent to which the elements it draws attention to are not *necessarily* used in this fashion by all speakers, the observation in question is not about anything that intrinsically *defines* 'Judeo-Spanish' qua 'Judeo-Spanish' vs. 'Spanish.' Third, even if we were to accept the existence of a set of lexical and structural features that are always used within a named language across time and space, the naming of the 'language' as such (e.g., 'Judeo-Spanish,' as opposed to 'Ladino' or '*Djudezmo*'; 'Spanish,' as opposed to '*Castilian*' or '*Kristilyano*'—literally 'Christian,' which is how some Sephardim refer to current 'Spanish') will still be partially contingent upon socio-political matters (more on this in Otheguy et al. 2015:288–289).

the traditional essentialist demarcation of 'Judeo-Spanish' in grammatical terms. I shall now turn my attention to the challenge that adopting translingualism and revivalistics poses to the 'language' conceptualization that underpins many scholarly and educational efforts to 'document,' 'preserve,' or 'save' 'Judeo-Spanish' as a 'minority language.'

2.2.1 The Object of our Focus Should Be the Sustainability of a Cultural-Linguistic Complex of Multiple Idiolects that Sephardi Speakers Find Valuable

It could be (and has been) argued that translanguaging undermines the efforts of minoritized speakers and the linguists who work with them to protect and revitalize their 'languages' and linguistic practices (Otheguy et al. 2015:282–3, 299). In our case, the objection is as follows: if Judeo-Spanish is not a '(minority) language' in the traditional ontological sense, what does it mean to document/preserve/save it? Does it even make sense to do so?

As explained by Otheguy et al. (2015:283, 289, 299), translanguaging allows us to move away from the otherwise conservative and purist goal of 'language maintenance/preservation,' which often sterilizes minoritized named languages,[13] turning them into museum pieces (including 'Judeo-Spanish'). Conversely, it implies the adoption of sustainable practices by multilingual speakers that thrive by activating their full linguistic repertoire without watchful adherence to the sociopolitically defined boundaries of a named language (in our case, 'Judeo-Spanish'). In doing so, translanguaging and by extension, the hauntological framework with which it coheres, facilitates (rather than impedes) the goal of protecting minoritized communities and their idiolects. In sum, sustainability efforts should be directed towards the affirmation and preservation of 'Judeo-Spanish' understood as a cultural-linguistic ensemble of idiolects and translanguaging practices deemed valuable by the members of the global Sephardi community, not as an essentialized, prescriptivized artifact (named language).

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13 From a critical perspective, 'Judeo-Spanish' (and further endangered languages) should not be adjectivized as 'minority,' but rather as 'minoritized.' 'Minority' is an adjective, whereas 'minoritized' is the past participle of the transitive verb 'to minoritize.' Unlike the former, the latter implies that someone has done something to create that 'minority,' i.e., it serves to emphasize that the current status of 'Judeo-Spanish' is not intrinsic to it, but rather the result of contingent historical processes (including colonization and migration).

2.2.2 The Realistic Revitalization of Judeo-Spanish is Premised on Embracing Hybridization as an Unavoidable Outcome of Fieldwork Linguistics

Drawing upon a similar anti-essentialist understanding of 'languages' as col-lect-ions, i.e., abstract ensembles of lects (sociolects, idiolects) in his volume *Revivalistics* (2020), Ghil'ad Zuckermann claims that as a transdisciplinary field of inquiry, revivalistics should help people engaged in 'language' reclamation (the revival of a no-longer-spoken 'language,' such as 'Hebrew'), reinvigoration (i.e., the revival of a 'language' that has a high percentage of children speaking it, but is still minoritized, such as 'Yiddish'),[14] and revitalization (i.e., the revival of a severely endangered 'language' with minimal intergenerational transmission, such as 'Judeo-Spanish'), to become less puristic and more realistic. This implies encouraging them to reject myths and accept, embrace, and celebrate inevitable hybridization: "Revivalistics discards any imprisoning purism prism and makes the community members realize that shift happens. And there is nothing wrong with shift happening. Hybridization results in new diversity, which is beautiful" (2020:209).

This crucial insight lies at the heart of the "impassioned plea" (Bunis 2016:337) made by French Ladino speaker Cobert Rohen to raise awareness about the fact that, as remarked by Zuckermann, shift does happen. In fact, were it not for this change, Rohen argues, Ladino would be already dead:

> A living language is perpetually changing; words are lost, others appear. To want to speak a pure Ladino of the fifteenth century is to erase five centuries of the life of our ancestors. It is to kill the dead of Salonika (who were murdered in the Holocaust) once again. What need do we have of Iberian purity? To rebuild the language of the Inquisitors? A language that no one speaks anymore? (...) We can say "*Ke tal*?" or "*Ke haber*?" ('What's doing?'; cf. Sp. *¿Que tal?* and Tk. *Ne haber*?); we don't have to choose one or the other—both are fine. French words entered the language? Where's the harm in this? It's a Romance language too. Even English words will enter? (e.g., I've already seen "un lider politiko" 'a political leader'). How nice! Only dead languages don't have this problem.[15]

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14   See the UNESCO *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (Moseley 2010).
15   Cited in Bunis 2016:337; italics and notes from Bunis.

2.2.3 The Revitalization of Judeo-Spanish Turns our Attention to the Minoritized Communities

First, as noted by Zuckermann, revival linguistics is not the opposite of documentary linguistics, but complementary to it. After all, the first stage of any 'language' revival must feature a protracted period of observation and careful listening, which is the province of 'language' documentation: "The bread and butter of linguistics are language documentation and analysis. These tasks are front and centre, especially before any language reclamation effort and before and during any revitalization or reinvigoration effort" (2020:214). On the other hand, revivalistics can and does address many of the ontological blindspots of documentary linguistics, in the absence of whose critique the "preservation" of minoritized 'languages' becomes hollow, i.e., "a sterile academic or technocratic exercise that cannot really be characterized as genuine language revival" (2020:211–2). Crucially, and much in the vein of the translanguaging approach, revivalistics helps us shift our attention from 'language' qua autonomous, discrete, self-contained system to the *speakers*, transforming the linguist into a community field activist, rather than an armchair intellectual:

> Revivalistics includes Revival Linguistics (...), which is very different from the already-established branch of linguistics called Documentary Linguistics (...). How different is revival linguistics from documentary linguistics? An insensitive linguist can still be a documentary linguist or a typologist but can hardly be a revivalist. Revivalists ought to work with the community. Their work is much more than a laboratory endeavour that analyses a morpheme or a phoneme (...) A revivalist cannot be an armchair linguist, who sits at home and analyses language. A revivalist cannot be a veranda linguist, who observes the natives without engaging them. A revivalist cannot be a caravan linguist, who interrogates a native speaker in a caravan until the native speaker faints out of exhaustion and then the linguist brings the next native speaker in the line. A revivalist must be a community field linguist.
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> ZUCKERMANN 2020:207–208

Second, community-based archives should focus on the speakers and seek to revitalize 'Judeo-Spanish' as a cultural-linguistic complex. Community-based archives have experienced considerable growth over the past fifty years. This has also been the case in Judeo-Spanish Studies, particularly since the beginning of the 21st century (*Autoridad Nasionala del Ladino i Su Kultura* 2011; *CoDiAJe* 2012; *Ladino 21* 2017, and the Judeo-Spanish collections of *Vanishing Languages and Cultural Heritage* 2020, and *Endangered Language Alliance* 2021). While the

overall impetus behind these archives is primarily descriptive (i.e., to show how Ladino is *de facto* spoken, rather than to prescribe how it *should* be spoken), ultimately curating an archive requires a number of prescriptive decisions on the part of its managers (i.e., choosing whom to interview and what parts to edit out—sometimes at the request of speakers—, how to organize the archive into collections/playlists). As a result, the end product lies somewhere on a continuum between standardized 'Judeo-Spanish' and the full idiolects and translanguaging practices that already exist in the community, and features plenty of sociolinguistic variation across region, gender, and learnedness.

Additional circumstances, such as the use of the archive in question for commercializing and/or pedagogical purposes, or the dialectal preferences of the most prestigious voices within the speaking community, may further incentivize archivers to adopt a prescriptive curation of the recorded material towards the artificial projection of a self-contained national 'language' ('Judeo-Spanish') as a well-bounded 'language,' lest they 'contaminate' the object of their documentation as a named language.

For instance, following the publication of a *Ladino 21* video where I interviewed L1 Ladino speaker Michael Halphie, Rachel Bortnick expressed her appreciation of it and further explained that her positive feedback was premised on the fact that Michael speaks Ladino "*comme il faut*" ("*komo se deve*" 'as you should'), coupled with his having been raised in the 'language':

> I was really enjoying listening to Michael, because he speaks exactly "comme il faut," and has the same story as many amongst us, whose parents did not leave Turkey (in my case, Izmir) since the day they arrived from Spain or Portugal, and who were raised in an entirely [Judeo]Spanish-speaking Jewish environment (...) I am really enjoying these interviews with people that speak good Ladino.[16]

Consequently, archivists might feel tempted to discourage or eliminate their participants' spontaneous translingual practices to manufacture an impression of lexical and grammatical coherence. While minoritized idiolects and practices require protection to grow, such growth should not occur at the expense of isolating them from the interactions of speakers whose idiolectal repertoires are much richer than what the archives are willing to license (Otheguy et al. 2015:302). Whereas learning to deploy one's idiolect to pass as a speaker of Judeo-Spanish qua named language is a crucial sociolinguistic accomplishment and a valuable social skill, participants must first be allowed

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16   From 2020; my translation from the Judeo-Spanish original.

to speak freely, even when that defeats and challenges monolingual expectations anchored in the classical ontological framework about named languages (in our case, 'Judeo-Spanish') (Otheguy et al. 2015:302).

While the names of these digital archives may respond to the perceived strategic advantage of labeling the archive through a recognizable language name, their aim should not be to document 'Judeo-Spanish' as a supposedly self-contained 'language.' The above-mentioned disincentives notwithstanding, their goal should be to revitalize 'Judeo-Spanish' as a cultural-linguistic complex of multiple idiolects with different attrition degrees and translanguaging practices that the community of Sephardi speakers (whether culturally or ethnically so) finds valuable.

Lastly, producing user-friendly apps, grammars, and dictionaries accessible to lay communities is paramount for both ethical and utilitarian reasons. In addition to including community speakers at every possible opportunity in the 'language' revival process, both translanguaging and revivalistics propose to revise the fields of grammaticography (writing grammars) and lexicography (writing dictionaries) towards the production of user-friendly grammars and dictionaries accessible to lay communities, rather than exclusively to professional linguists (Zuckermann 2020:227–39).

If, for instance, an app is produced, photos of the community speakers, particularly those of respected elders and/or children, should be featured so they can see themselves and community members acknowledged and represented in the resource. Likewise, their voices (as opposed to non-indigenous community members) should be used in any related sound recordings. While Zuckermann discusses the example of the *Barngarla Dictionary App* (2020: 233–239), a more relevant case for our analysis would be *uTalk*'s *Ladino App* (2019). In agreement with *uTalk*'s internal policies on the matter, after translating the corpus from 'English' into 'Judeo-Spanish,' myself and Acero Ayuda contacted two well-respected elderly community speakers: Rachel Bortnick and Benni Aguado. They were paid travel and accommodation expenses and asked to revise the corpus translation carried out by myself and Acero Ayuda and record every word with their own voices (*uTalk* 2019). Pictures were taken of both Judeo-Spanish L1 speakers and disseminated through renowned community sources such as *El Amaneser* (2005–), the only newspaper in the world written exclusively in Judeo-Spanish.

As noted by Zuckermann, this is both the *right thing to do* and the one that benefits speakers the most, as it helps them re-establish their connection with the 'language,' culture, traditions, and (diasporic) land, shaping the future of 'Judeo-Spanish' and reinforcing a sense of belonging, (non-essentialized) identity, self-worth, and well-being (2020:xxiii).

2.3 *Education: Teaching Judeo-Spanish as a Partial Overlapping of Idiolects*

Having discussed at length the implications of adopting a hauntological approach on the linguistic reconceptualization of 'Judeo-Spanish' and its revitalization as a minoritized 'language,' in this last subsection I turn my attention to the field of education, seeking to answer the following: How can a hauntological approach mediated by a translingual model change the understanding that educators bring to 'Judeo-Spanish' education? How can this shift contribute to the educational growth of 'Judeo-Spanish' students and the intellectual growth of 'Judeo-Spanish' Studies qua field? The implications are as follows.

2.3.1 The Acquisition of Fluency in Judeo-Spanish Depends on a Sociopolitical Act of Selective Legitimation

Translanguaging proponents agree with supporters of named language education that the ability of students to perform as fluent users of a named language (in our case, 'Judeo-Spanish') is a valuable skill, a worthwhile educational goal, and a legitimate aspect for which to test (Otheguy et al. 2015:301). However, they have also noted that the acquisition of this specialized skill is predicated on a sociopolitical act of selective legitimation, namely: teaching a version of a named language (Judeo-Spanish, in our case) known as "the standard" (which is more accurately and fairly labeled as "standardized," to emphasize that there is nothing intrinsic to this register that makes it the standard; rather, its current status as standard is the result of a contingent historical process). Such a standardized variant leaves out several features conventionally associated with the named language in question. Instead, and according to Otheguy et al. (2015:301), "it makes room only for those features that index social prestige, that is, only those idiolectal features found in the speech of those who share a superior class membership, political power, and, in many cases, an ethnic identity."

In the case of 'Judeo-Spanish' instruction, some of these aspects hold, whereas others reveal a complexity that was unforeseen in the translingual model.

The standardized 'Judeo-Spanish' version that prevails in education is indeed a specific variant of the named language: 'Judezmo,' i.e., the eastern vernacular (sub)branch of 'Ladino,' as opposed to its Western Mediterranean vernacular ('Haketia'), and the calque version prior to both of them that emerged in the Iberian Peninsula before the 1492 expulsion.[17] Within this specific variant, one can distinguish between two hegemonic forms of Judeo-Spanish used for instructional purposes. In Europe and some parts

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17   More on this in n. 2.

of the USA, the prevailing geolect is that of Istanbul, Turkey (which, due to socio-historical factors, currently features a much larger community of 'Judeo-Spanish' speakers than other traditionally major speech centers in the Balkans, such as Salonika or Sarajevo), almost always presented exclusively in (French-Ottoman, as opposed to Castilian) romanization and in a register that is very close to the contemporary spoken 'language.' In this sense, the most widely adopted pedagogical volume is the English translation of Marie-Christine Varol's *Manuel de judéo-espagnol: langue et culture* (Paris, 1998). This is also the variant that prevails in online platforms such as *Ladinokomunita*, *Los Ladinadores* and *Ladino 21*. On the other hand, in Israel and some parts of the USA, the prevailing standardized form does not focus on the contemporary spoken 'language' of a singular city/country of the Sephardic diaspora (such as Istanbul), and is instead presented primarily in the Rashi script (and, to a much lesser degree, in Latin, Cyrillic, and Solitreo), drawing upon a diversity of literary genres as traditionally cultivated in the major Sephardi centers of the globe, such as Jerusalem, Istanbul, Izmir, Salonika, Constantinople, Sarajevo, Belgrade, Sofia, and New York. The most celebrated instance of this pedagogical approach is David Bunis' *Judezmo: An Introduction to the Language of the Sephardic Jews of the Ottoman Empire* (1999), written in Hebrew and Ladino.

Contrary to translingual expectations, though, the named vernacular version of the Eastern Mediterranean variety of 'Ladino' that is now hegemonic for educational purposes ('Judeo-Spanish') only partially features the idiolectal characteristics found in the speech of those who share a superior class membership (the rabbis, for example, in Bunis' manual, but certainly not in Varol's), and it only partially coincides with those who wield the most political power.[18]

On the other hand, in most cases, speakers of this named language did learn 'Judeo-Spanish' through home-based intergenerational transmission (although there are some notable exceptions, including myself and Acero Ayuda, as well as Bryan Kirschen, plus neither Varol nor Bunis are L1 speakers). It is also the case that in alignment with Latinization as a worldwide hegemonic language

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18   Eliezer Papo has argued that the current standardized variety of 'Ladino' as a named language ('Judeo-Spanish'), which relies heavily on 'Spanish' ('Castilian') vocabulary at the expense of 'Turkish' and 'Hebrew' words, is mostly based on the female genderlect transmitted intergenerationally at home by Sephardi women as part of their children's educational upbringing: "it ought to be understood that from the moment he got up, a man (…) spent the day in the market with other men; and the woman, at home and in the courtyard with other women. This is why there were entire male genderlects (…) which is everything that has to do with finances (…) politics (…) government (…) men spoke a very Turkish-inflected Judeo-Spanish (…) and on the other hand, the second men begin to speak about law, they switch to Hebrew" (2021; my translation from the 'Judeo-Spanish' original).

ideology involving a transition of the predominant and/or traditional alphabet of a named language into the Latin script, nowadays and with notable exceptions ('Judeo-Spanish' courses and/or workshops at Bar-Ilan, Oxford University, University College London, and *Ladino 21*), Judeo-Spanish is no longer primarily taught in its otherwise traditionally predominant Hebrew scripts (Merubah, Rashi, and Solitreo, Rashi being by far the most utilized script), let alone in any other alphabet historically used to write in Judeo-Spanish, such as Arabic, Cyrillic (only taught at *Ladino 21* and Oxford University), and Greek.

The current status of 'Judeo-Spanish' education across the world does validate the translingual tenet that the acquisition of a named language such as 'Judeo-Spanish' consists of a sociopolitical act of selective legitimation.

2.3.2 When Teaching Judeo-Spanish, Schools Should Not Repress the Learner's Full Idiolect and Translanguaging Practices

Translanguaging advocates agree with traditional 'language' education proponents that minoritized idiolects and practices (such as those related to Judeo-Spanish) need protection to grow (see above). However, translinguists take issue with the fact that, when teaching named languages, schools segregate minoritized speakers from their full idiolects and translanguaging practices. By restricting their idiolects on socio-political grounds, including the suppression of some of their parts, the traditional teaching of named languages (including Judeo-Spanish) discourages learners from incorporating new linguistic features and practices into their own repertoire (Otheguy et al. 2015:302). Consequently, the new features (in our case, those belonging to standardized Judeo-Spanish as described above) hardly ever restructure their mental grammar on the basis of these new interactions, reshape their speech in ways that are unique to them, or ameliorate their repertoire. In turn, this has made it impossible for many multilingual learners to become successful, creative, and critical learners (Otheguy et al. 2015:302).

This problem is particularly acute in the case of 'Judeo-Spanish,' because due to its diasporic nature and current status as severely endangered, the virtual totality of speakers of 'Judeo-Spanish' as a named language are multilingual (i.e., most of them know other 'languages,' which they use more frequently than 'Judeo-Spanish' [Harris 1994:255]) and engage in consistent translanguaging practices daily.

In this sense, and drawing upon de Jong's (2011) educational equity framework, Tuba Yilmaz (2019) has explored the potential of translanguaging as a pedagogy than can promote multilingualism (e.g., via the use of students' linguistic resources as a form of scaffolding for content learning, in alignment with my suggested response to a common objection below), affirm

student identities enroute to the creation of 'third spaces' (Flores & García 2013) and new realities, and combat structural inequalities (by equalizing the status of named languages and increasing the participation of students in decision-making processes) in classrooms that feature language-minoritized students.

In this sense and contrary to popular misconception, teaching the target named language in question ('Judeo-Spanish') does not necessarily need to take place through that 'language,' nor is this necessarily more desirable, since as demonstrated in international research in the last two decades, new language practices only emerge in interrelationship with old language practices (García 2013:3).[19]

Consequently, and as discussed above, only educational programs that allow students to use their entire linguistic repertoire (and not just part of it to exclusively develop proficiency in a restricted number of language practices that conform to the academic uses of Judeo-Spanish as a named language in school) can result in 'Judeo-Spanish' learners successfully integrating aspects of this named language in the mental grammar of their unique linguistic repertoires.

Occasionally one could come across multilingual speakers in the classroom who lack the ability to communicate fluently in major named languages relevant to the Sephardi diaspora, such as 'Spanish,' 'French,' 'Hebrew,' or 'English'. We could imagine, for instance, a case where the student in question can only communicate in the named languages of 'Turkish' and 'Judeo-Spanish,' or 'Serbian' and 'Judeo-Spanish,' respectively. In these scenarios, we could rely on one or more individuals to bridge that gap (ideally the instructor, otherwise one or more classmates familiar with the named language in question), and/or combine this effort with the supplementary use of visuals, gestures, sounds, emojis, and further forms of non-verbal communication (for an equivalent example, see Brown 2017). Moreover, as convincingly argued by Flores & García (2013), any instructor who seeks to equalize power relations in the classroom can successfully implement translanguaging, regardless of whether they are 'monolingual' or 'bilingual.'

2.3.3   The Assessment of One's Linguistic Performance in Judeo-Spanish qua Named Language is Ultimately Cultural and Political

Assessing the richness and complexity of each learner's unique idiolect must be kept separate from testing their ability to recognize and adhere to politically

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19   Additionally, for a discussion of the specific value of pedagogical translanguaging in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), see Cenoz & Gorter 2022.

defined boundaries in the deployment of such idiolect. While the former amounts to an actual assessment of linguistic proficiency, the latter consists in an assessment of cultural and political proficiency. When these two aspects are conflated so that the learners are tested for both, the results will be determined by and reflect the learner's cultural identity as much as their linguistic and communicative proficiency (Otheguy 2015:299).

This problem translates into a strong normativist tendency in online Judeo-Spanish-speaking fora such as *Ladinokomunita*, where, as its founder remarked, to the extent to which, historically speaking, the home was the main site of linguistic intergenerational transmission, "(…) it seems to everyone that the language we heard in our houses is the correct one" (2011; cit. in Bunis 2016:346). Here linguistic proficiency, as measured against the yardstick of what Judeo-Spanish L1 speakers used to hear at home, indexes Sephardic identity apropos the deployment of the 'language' qua vernacular (Brink-Danan 2011:108). However, as Brink-Danan points out (109), this assumption relies on the reduction of languaging to its vernacular aspect (i.e., as a means of communication), only to then create a false equivalence between 'Judeo-Spanish' vernacularity on the one hand, and Sephardic identity, on the other. This equivalence obfuscates an additional dimension of 'Judeo-Spanish,' i.e., its ability to symbolize cultural commonality over its utility as a means of communication (what Shandler dubs "postvernacularity," which he has explored apropos Yiddish [2006:4]).

Moreover, while in educational settings accuracy of measurement is a fundamental principle, forbidding multilinguals to translanguage, or assessing it negatively, results in an inaccurate and unfair measure of their 'language' proficiency. For proficiency assessment to be accurate and informative, it needs to adopt the inside perspective (i.e., that of mental grammar) that will reveal the linguistic condition of the individual learner's idiolect, regardless of the social rules that (dis)qualify some or all of the idiolect as belonging to a particular named language such as 'Judeo-Spanish' (Shandler 2006:4).

Prescribing that some learners attempt to restrict their repertoire to the limits of standardized 'Judeo-Spanish' amounts to insisting that they try to pass for people with a different cultural and personal identity and background. Yet this is exactly what is being done, for example, when 'Judeo-Spanish'/'Spanish,' 'Judeo-Spanish'/'Hebrew,' and 'Judeo-Spanish'/'Haketia' multilingual learners (to name some of the most common cases) are told that while speaking or writing 'Judeo-Spanish' they are never to use their 'Spanish,' 'Hebrew,' or 'Haketia' words (e.g., *Los Ladinadores*, 2020). Furthermore, due to the current preponderance of Anglo-Saxon culture in our globalized world, 'English' is now also the target of prescriptivist 'Judeo-Spanish' speakers. For instance, writing on

Ladinokomunita in 2010, Yehuda Hatsvi resorted to nature-based metaphors to normalize Spanish (Castilian) linguistic origins while othering 'English' ones, for 'English' is "a foreign plant in our garden" (cit. in Bunis 2016:338). Ultimately, the rationale behind this prescriptive policy is not linguistic but political, and as remarked by Cobert, its implementation can only take place at the expense of impoverishing the speaker's repertoire, which ultimately amounts to not accepting them just as they are:

> (...) The correct way of writing and speaking Judeo-Spanish does not exist, and no language authority can establish it without throwing into the garbage all the other forms, which would be an impoverishment. I don't throw anything away, I accept everything, with those who accept me, such as I am.[20]

3   Conclusions

In this article I have problematized the ontology of 'Judeo-Spanish' qua 'language.' First, I have argued that the traditional conceptualization of 'Judeo-Spanish' as a discrete, autonomous 'language' is predicated upon a classical ontological framework that is congruent with so-called 'named languages theory' (Heller 2007; Jørgensen et al. 2011; Makoni & Pennycook 2007). Second, I have explicated that a more enlightened understanding of 'Judeo-Spanish' as a linguistic phenomenon requires a paradigm shift towards a hauntological framework (Derrida 1993, 2012; Fisher 2006, 2012) (as opposed to an ontological one) consistent with translanguaging (García 2013; García & Wei 2014; Otheguy et al. 2015) (as opposed to named languages theory) and revivalistics (Zuckermann 2020). This shift allows us to reconceptualize 'Judeo-Spanish' more accurately and fairly as an ensemble of the only partially overlapping idiolects of people who share a common Sephardi cultural/ethnic identity (i.e., that of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492) and who manage to communicate with greater or lesser success. Third, I have discussed the radical implications of this shift in three domains as they intersect with the field of 'Judeo-Spanish' Studies: linguistics, minority rights, and education.

Concerning linguistics, I have highlighted that structural linguists in particular, and linguists in general, are unable to lend support to either the colonial claim that 'Judeo-Spanish' is a dialect of Spanish or the postcolonial/decolonial affirmation that 'Judeo-Spanish' and Spanish are two separate 'languages,' since

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20   Ladinokomunita 2011; cited in Bunis 2016:345.

the separability and nameability of 'Judeo-Spanish' depend, ultimately, on cultural, social, and political factors. By the same token and given that named languages like 'Judeo-Spanish' are a collection of the only partially overlapping idiolects of people who share a common cultural identity, it follows that no one really speaks 'Judeo-Spanish.' This does not mean that we should abandon the concepts of 'Judeo-Spanish' or 'Judeo-Spanish speaker.' However, it does imply that when we use them, we must use them strategically (as opposed to coherently), and from an outsider's perspective (as opposed to an insider's one related to the mental grammar of speakers), i.e., bearing in mind that qua named language category, 'Judeo-Spanish' has been constructed throughout history for social purposes linked to the imposition of political power, as well as challenges to it, and the identification of a minoritized group.

Regarding minority rights, 'Judeo-Spanish' is more accurately and fairly conceptualized as minoritized, rather than 'minority,' to highlight that its current endangered status is not intrinsic to it, but rather the result of a contingent historical process. In addition, the traditional goal of 'Judeo-Spanish' maintenance/preservation by strengthening an essentialist set of lexical and grammatical features that has received the name 'Judeo-Spanish' (or 'Ladino,' 'Judezmo,' etc.) ought to be replaced by the goal of rendering sustainable a cultural-linguistic complex of multiple idiolects with different attrition degrees and translanguaging practices that the community of Sephardi speakers (whether culturally or ethnically so) finds valuable. Finally, this effort entails a move away from conservative and purist idealizations about 'Judeo-Spanish' as a named language, instead embracing hybridization as an unavoidable outcome of fieldwork linguistics, where a linguist should become a community field activist (rather than an armchair intellectual), able and willing to curate community-based archives focusing on the speakers and to produce user-friendly apps, grammars, and dictionaries accessible to lay communities and representative of them.

Lastly, concerning 'Judeo-Spanish' education, the acquisition of fluency in this named language depends on a sociopolitical act of selective legitimation predicated on the vernacular transmitted at home in the lands of the Ottoman empire, and written in French-Ottoman romanization. When teaching 'Judeo-Spanish,' schools and other types of educational programs should encourage the learner's use of their full idiolect and translanguaging practices, which will allow them to meaningfully and creatively incorporate the learned lexical and structural elements into their linguistic repertoire. Because of this, teaching 'Judeo-Spanish' "in Judeo-Spanish" is not necessarily better or more desirable than doing it through translanguaging practices. Finally, the assessment of the learner's linguistic performance in 'Judeo-Spanish' qua

named language is ultimately cultural and political, as well as separate from the assessment of the complexity and richness of the learner's unique idiolect.

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