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## 9 Convergence and Failure to Converge in Relative Social Isolation: Balkan Judezmo

**Abstract:** This chapter<sup>1</sup> on Judezmo shows how easily some features can penetrate into a language system, especially those aspects of the lexicon and morphosyntax most tied to conversation and the habits of pronunciation acquired via heavy use of the socially dominant language. The mix of Balkan features in Judezmo sharpens a sense of what it means to be peripheral within a Sprachbund. Some of the developments of Judezmo, with either sources or parallels elsewhere in Ibero-Romance, show that both timing and environment — here the Balkan chronotope — are crucial in helping to distinguish between that which is convergent and that which is parallel.

### 9.1 Historical background

From ancient times, it is clear that there were Jewish inhabitants on the Iberian peninsula, even if it is not entirely clear whether the first evidence of their presence dates to Biblical times or later, during the period of the Roman Empire and its control of the entire Mediterranean. Whatever their origins there, by Mediaeval times, Jews constituted a flourishing, intellectually lively, and generally well-to-do population within a predominantly Christian environment in both Spain and Portugal. By some estimates, by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there were as many as 300,000 Jews in the area.

Medieval

After 1492, however, this population was nearly entirely wiped out, due to the Alhambra Decree (the Edict of Expulsion, enacted 2 August), which required practicing Jews to leave Spain and Portugal. Most of those expelled from Spain were Spanish-speaking, “Sephardic” Jews,<sup>2</sup> and they relocated to various points in the Mediterranean and Europe, including North Africa, France, The Netherlands, and the Balkans, which were then largely under the control of the Ottoman Turks. These Jews were invited by Ottoman sultan Beyazit II, and the

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter would not have been possible without the considerable input of my good friend and collaborator Victor Friedman, specifically knowledge that I gained about Judezmo in the Balkans from working with him on Friedman & Joseph (2014; 2021). My debt to the general work on those pieces is hereby acknowledged.

<sup>2</sup> This label is based on the Hebrew word *sefarad* (a Biblical location that was identified by Jews as Spain).

Ottoman Empire in general was attractive because it offered a greater degree of religious tolerance than they might have enjoyed elsewhere. In the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, these Spanish Jews came to populate urban centers all over the Balkans, first in Greece, Macedonia, and Turkey. In Greece, the Sephardim settled mainly in the north, with the two large cities of Thessaloniki and Ioannina being the major loci, although islands both in the Ionian Sea, especially Corfu, and in the Aegean Sea, such as Chios, also came to have significant Sephardic populations. In Macedonia, the cities of Bitola, Skopje, and Štip ended up being home to significant numbers of Sephardim; and in Turkey, Constantinople (later known as Istanbul) was the major focal point for Spanish Jewish in-migration. There were more scattered settlements in Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Dalmatia, and Bulgaria, and later movement from Bosnia and Bulgaria in the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought a considerable number of Sephardim to Romania, primarily to Bucharest.

Bad break;  
=> Sephardic

It is difficult to be certain about the numbers of those who re-settled in the Balkans, but working from various sources, one can develop the following figures for some of the largest Jewish cities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century:

- c. 50,000 Jews in Constantinople
- c. 60,000 Jews in Bucharest
- c. 75,000 Jews in Thessaloniki

Most of these were Spanish Jews, though in Bucharest, many Jews came from Russia due to pogroms there. These populations suffered almost total annihilation at the hands of the Germans in the Holocaust before and during World War II, so that Balkan cities now are almost empty of their former Jewish populations, with only some 3,000 in Bucharest, and less than 1,500 in Thessaloniki. Most of the survivors have settled in Israel, with c. 100,000 there now, many of whom actively continue the use of their language.

The Sephardic Jews brought with them as their native Spanish language, actually in what can be considered an ethnolectal form that can be referred to as “Jewish Spanish”, or perhaps better, “Judeo-Spanish”. This variety co-existed with other non-Jewish and Jewish languages in Spain (e.g., Arabic and a Jewish form of Arabic, Judeo-Arabic), as Wexler (1981) makes clear.

But separation from the Iberian homeland post-1492 gave the opportunity for the development of other differences, resulting both from changes that Iberian Spanish underwent that the newly separated Jewish Spanish did not and from changes that Jewish Spanish underwent in its new settings that Iberian Spanish did not. The resulting variety of Spanish is thus recognized as a distinct language, and is known as Judezmo, Judeo-Spanish, Judeo-Espagnol, or

Ladino,<sup>3</sup> and in its North African (mainly Moroccan) form, Haketia. As far as the Balkans are concerned, two major dialects can be recognized for the language, Eastern Judezmo and Western Judezmo. The eastern dialect includes the speech of the Turkish Sephardic communities of Istanbul and Izmir, the Greek island of Rhodes, and the largest Greek city in the north, Thessaloniki. Western Judezmo includes the dialects of Sephardic speakers in Bulgaria (Sofia), Romania (Bucharest), Macedonia (Bitola), Serbia (Belgrade), and Bosnia (Sarajevo). The language is relatively well documented from various periods, and there is a large and important body of scholarship on it in all its geographic varieties; this includes bibliographic compilations such as Studemund (1975) and Bunis (1981), as well as the overviews provided by Sala (1976) and Sephiha (1986), and essays such as Bunis (1983; 2011), as well as lexical studies such as Bunis (1993). Some sources that are specifically on Balkan varieties of Judezmo are Bunis (1999), Crews (1935), Gabinskij (1992), Luria (1930), Sala (1970; 1971), Sephiha (1996–1998), Symeonides (2002), Walter (1920), Wagner (1914; 1923; 1925; 1930).<sup>4</sup>

## 9.2 Importance of Judezmo for Balkan linguistics

It is well known that the Balkans have always been a hotbed of multilingualism and language contact. The particularly intense and sustained multilingualism and contact among speakers of different languages there led, beginning in the Medieval period during Ottoman times, to a structural and lexical convergence in the languages in question. The resulting convergence zone, with striking similarities in both structural features and lexical elements across several languages defines what is usually referred to in the literature as a “Sprachbund” or “linguistic area”. These languages include: Albanian (in northern Gheg and southern Tosk dialects); the Balkan Romance languages made up of Aromanian, Meglenoromanian, and Romanian; Balkan Slavic made up of Bulgarian, Macedonian, and the southeastern (“Torlak”) dialects of Serbian; Greek, Romani, and Balkan (Western Rumelian) Turkish. The features that characterize the Sprachbund are known as “Balkanisms” and they range over all components of grammar – phonology, morphology, morphosyntax, syntax, and even semantics – as well as the lexicon.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The name *Ladino* is used by some specialists for a written form of the language used in translating religious texts in Hebrew in a word-for-word fashion. Following Bunis (2018: 185–187), I primarily use the name Judezmo here.

⇒ (1981) <sup>4</sup> Wexler (1981) is a detailed overview of the phenomenon of Jewish languages more generally, with a number of references to Judezmo specifically.

<sup>5</sup> See Friedman & Joseph (2021) for details on the Balkan Sprachbund more generally.

A key question to ask about Judezmo vis-à-vis these other languages is the extent to which it participates in the convergence that characterizes the Balkan Sprachbund. In other words, to what extent does Judezmo show “Balkanisms” (i.e., Balkan convergent features)? This is an interesting and important question to ask for several reasons, all having to do with illuminating the nature of the contact situation in the Balkans. First, because Judezmo was a relatively late arrival on the Balkan contact scene, compared to the other convergent languages, it is possible to determine the chronology of some features and in some cases to weigh the relative importance of timing and structure to outcomes of language contact. Second, the relative social isolation of the Judezmo-speaking Jewish communities scattered across the central areas of the region gives a social index for the feature. Finally, the existence of both Spanish and Judezmo dialects outside the Balkans (e.g., for Judezmo, in North Africa) makes it possible to decide between contact-related Balkan convergence and simple coincidence (or other scenarios) to explain the presence of various features in Judezmo and other languages in the region.<sup>6</sup>

### 9.2.1 Relevance of these Questions Illustrated

The relevance of these questions can be illustrated through a consideration of various case studies. For instance, from the domain of morphosyntax one can point to the analytic comparison of Balkan Judezmo; e.g., *mas blanco* ‘more white; whiter’. In particular, although this Judezmo structure matches the parallel structure found in various languages of the Balkan Sprachbund, e.g., Greek *pjo ómorfo* ‘more beautiful’, Albanian *më interesant* ‘more interesting’, the convergence is completely coincidental, as this feature is found all over non-Balkan Judezmo and all over Spanish dialects (and in Romance more widely, for that matter). It is thus best treated as part of the linguistic inheritance that Sephardim brought with them to the Balkans, though contact with Balkan languages having such a structure could well have reinforced the continuation of this inherited feature.

A phonological example that serves as a similar case regarding the questions in Section 10.2 pertains to the raising of unstressed /e, o/ to /i, u/. This development is found in northern Greek, eastern Macedonian, eastern Bulgarian, and Aromanian. Intriguingly, mid-vowel raising is also found in several regional varieties of Judezmo, e.g. in Bitola (southern Macedonia), Veroia (Northern Greece), Kastoria (northern Greece), areas that are co-territorial with some of the other Balkan languages showing this vowel development. The contiguity of the Judezmo

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<sup>6</sup> See also Friedman & Joseph (2014), and Friedman & Joseph (2021: Chapters 1 and 8), as well as Joseph (2019) for discussion of Judezmo as a Balkan language.

vowel raising area with these other languages naturally raises the specter of language contact being responsible, so that the Judezmo raising would be evidence of its “participation” in Balkan Sprachbund structural convergences. However, some varieties of Judezmo raise these vowels only word-finally, while others have the raising of /o/ only pretonically, while still others show raising also of /a/ to /e/. Thus there is less convergence on details of the raising than one might expect if the Judezmo and Balkan phenomena were connected. Moreover, the Judezmo of Bitola has had significant influence from Portuguese, via the expulsions from Iberia of 1497, and Portuguese is a language in which raising occurs as well. Thus this is most likely a coincidental convergence, with pre-Balkan roots as far as Judezmo is concerned. This feature, therefore, cannot be attributed to the Balkan context in which Judezmo came to exist.

⇒ As a consequence of examining features such as these two, one cannot take a similarity between Judezmo and other Balkan languages at face value. Each must be subjected to the same sort of diachronic qualitative investigation as these examples have been.

## 9.2.2 Balkanisms in Judezmo

Despite the “near-misses” in Section 9.2.1 that turn out not to show Balkan language contact influence, there are a number of legitimate Balkanisms in Judezmo, features that show Judezmo to be like Balkan Sprachbund members in various ways that moreover have the mark of having begun via language contact after Judezmo entered the Balkans. These convergent features range over all components of the language, from phonology to morphosyntax to syntax proper and the lexicon, as outlined in the sections that follow.

### 9.2.2.1 Phonology

Like other languages in the Balkans, at least some Balkan Judezmo varieties, especially that of Bucharest (Sala 1971), show multiple affricates, and they have a hissing/hushing opposition, specifically [c] / [tʃ], (roughly: apico-dental / alveo-palatal). As far as Balkan languages are concerned, this feature is found in the more central Balkan northern dialects of Greek, in Albanian, in Balkan Slavic, and in Balkan Romance. Importantly, such an affricate presence is not found in other Spanish dialects.

Other varieties of Balkan Judezmo, e.g., that in Thessaloniki, have only the hushing affricates, [tʃ] versus [dʒ], but in that case, the occurrence of the voiced

affricate is important as it is absent as such from most Iberian Spanish dialects, yet present in Turkish, in Bulgarian and Macedonian, though to a quite limited extent, and in Greek in a systematically altered form to the hissing affricate [dz].

Still, it must be noted that Old Spanish did have a [dʒ], and this remains in Judezmo while in Modern Castilian it underwent a change to [ʃ] and later [x]. This change took place probably around the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century or the start of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, so that it was too late to have affected Judezmo. However, any potential incipient tendency affecting [dʒ] at the time of the departure of the Jews from Spain would have been suppressed in the Balkans with the abundance of affricates in the various languages there.

### 9.2.2.2 Morpho-Syntactic

In the domain of morpho-syntax, there are several widespread Balkan structural features that can be found in the Judezmo of various locales in the Balkans. These are discussed in the subsections that follow.

#### Evidentiality

Many Balkan languages, in particular Turkish, South Slavic, Albanian, and even some varieties of Aromanian, show special verbal forms that mark “evidentiality”, indicating the source of information, especially whether one knows something by seeing it oneself or instead by hearing about it from someone else; this is thus a “witnessed” (‘seen’) versus “unwitnessed” (‘unseen’, ‘reported’, ‘unconfirmed’) distinction, encoded in the grammar,

Interestingly for the question of Judezmo as a Balkan language, some Judezmo speakers of Istanbul are reported to use the pluperfect as a calque on the Turkish use of perfect marker *-miş* as a non-confirmative, reported, or unwitnessed past; an example is given in (1):<sup>7</sup>

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7 I take these examples from Varol (2001). They are cited elsewhere in the literature; e.g., by Friedman (2003), Friedman & Joseph (2014), and Slobin (2016), as illustrative of evidentiality marking in some Judezmo. Still, there is reason to believe (based on information from an anonymous, but clearly well-informed reviewer of Joseph (2019)) that such marking may be an idiolectal phenomenon and not a feature that ever was or is now widespread within the Istanbul Judezmo community. Nonetheless, even if produced by a single speaker, and even if a one-off, nonce phenomenon, these examples show how contact with Turkish can affect the production of Judezmo by some speakers.

- (1) *Kuando estaban en l' América, les aviya*  
 when they.were.IMP in the America them.DAT had.IMP  
*entrado ladrón*  
 enter.PTCP thief  
 ‘When they were in America [i.e., not at home], a thief (apparently) broke into their house.’

A comparable sentence in Turkish, somewhat simplified, would be as in (2), with the *-miş* verbal form:

- (2) *Onlar yok-ken, hırsız gir-miş* (Turkish)  
 they not.exist-while thief enter-REP.PRF  
 ‘While they weren’t there, a thief (apparently) entered’

Similarly, Judezmo has sentences such as (3):

- (3) *Dos ermanos eran, uno salyó doktor dişçi, el*  
 two brothers were.IMP one became.PRET doctor dentist the  
*otro salyó dahilkiye después* ←s' *aviya etcho* align better  
 other became.PRET internist afterwards REFL had.IMP made.PST.PTCP  
*doktor de bebés* (Judezmo) delete \_  
 doctor of babies  
 ‘There were two brothers, one became a dentist and the other became an internist, afterwards he seems to have become (lit. had become) a pediatrician’

This example is a statement about an unwitnessed, thus reported event, and like (1), uses a pluperfect. It is important to note that pluperfects used in this way would not be grammatical in (Castilian) Spanish), so that contact with Turkish is a reasonable hypothesis as the cause of this innovation.

Marking for evidentiality in this way does not occur in Iberian Spanish, but it does occur in some forms of Spanish. Importantly, though, it is only in those varieties of Spanish that have been influenced by languages with evidential systems or usages that evidentiality marking occurs. For instance, in the Spanish of Peru, the pluperfect is used to give evidential effects, much as in the examples cited here, and substratal influence of Quechua’s evidential system is the likely source of that innovation.

Therefore, to the extent that these examples reflect usage for some speakers of Judezmo (see footnote <sup>76</sup>), evidentiality marking can be taken as a Balkan-inspired innovation in the language.

### Conditional sentences

Montoliu & van der Auwera (2004) point out that Judezmo can have both a protasis and an apodosis in conditional sentences with an indicative imperfect, possibilities not found in either Old or Modern Spanish. <sup>h</sup>as is exemplified in (4). This is a feature, however, that is found in Turkish and in Greek, the latter illustrated in (5):

(4) *Si me yamavan ya iva* (Judezmo)  
 If me call.IMPf.IND.3PL PTCL go.IMPf.IND.1SG  
 ‘If they called me/were to call me, I would go.’

(5) *An ebenes, ton evlepes* (Greek)  
 if enter.IMPf.2SG him see.IMPf.2SG  
 ‘If you went in / were to go in, you would see him’

Judezmo also can use the anterior past, the pluperfect, in the apodosis, again like Turkish and Greek. Importantly, this usage of the pluperfect is unlike Modern or Old Spanish, so that this seems to be a legitimate instance of influence from a Balkan language on Judezmo.

### Future tense

Judezmo has a synthetic future tense formation that derives from a univerbation of a Late Latin periphrasis consisting of an infinitive followed by conjugated forms of the present tense of ‘have’, e.g. *diré* ‘I will say, from earlier *dicere habeō* (literally “say.INF have.1sg”).<sup>8</sup> This is a potentially interesting fact from a Balkanological standpoint as there are some ‘have’-based futures in Balkan languages; however, such forms occur also in Spanish, so that they could well reflect a feature Sephardim brought with them to the Balkans. As for the Balkans, *have*-forms occur primarily in Romanian, e.g., *am să scriu* ‘I will write’, literally “I.have that I.write”, but this structure reflects a Romanian inheritance from the Late Latin periphrasis, with the replacement of the infinitive by finite complementation, as found throughout Balkan syntax (see Section 9.2.2.3). As such, this type would be equatable to the Spanish and Judezmo type, differing only in the fate of the infinitive. Moreover, the *have*-future found elsewhere in Balkan Romance, in particular northern Aromanian, does not make for a significant point of comparison for understanding the Balkanological status of Judezmo because it is found

<sup>8</sup> The fact that this future tense derives historically from a phrasal, analytic, formation is no obstacle to calling it “synthetic”, since from a synchronic point of view, it functions as a single word and is not analyzable in the way that the construction was in Late Latin.

add comm  
 ==> h, as

only in negated forms, e.g. *noare s' neadzim* (not.have.1sg that go.1sg) 'I will not go', and is thus a pattern that matches Macedonian (and Bulgarian); this means that it is a likely structural borrowing (calque) from Balkan Slavic. Thus the synthetic future tense of Judezmo, even though formed with 'have' like some other Balkan languages, is of no Balkanological significance in and of itself.

However, in Spanish (and other Romance languages), and in Judezmo, there is also an analytic future based on the verb 'go', e.g. *voy a escribir* 'I will write' (literally "I.go to write.INF") that competes with the synthetic future form from infinitive + 'have', as in Spanish. This type turns out to have Balkanological significance in an indirect but important way. In particular, Balkan languages have an analytic future based on the verb 'want', e.g. Greek *θα γράψω* 'I will write', based on an earlier *θε(λι) να γράψω* (literally "it.will that I.write", where 'will' is originally the 3sg present form of 'want'), Albanian *do të shkruaj*, where *do* is the 3sg present of *dua* 'want', Aromanian *va s-cântu* 'I will sing', where *va* is based on the 3sg form of 'want' and the *s* is a subordinating particle. Even though Greek, for instance, in its present state, might be best treated as a synthetic form, i.e. with *θα* as a prefix and not a separate word (see Sims & Joseph 2018:118 on this), the more clearly analytic type persisted into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Thumb 1964).

This situation with the Judezmo future becomes significant with respect to Judezmo and the Balkan Sprachbund because of the way the competition between the analytic future with 'go' and the synthetic future is being resolved. In particular, Judezmo favors the analytic 'go' future over synthetic 'have' future. In a text-based study, Kramer & Perez-Leroux (2007) found that a text count reveals that only 2 out of 40 futures in their corpus were synthetic, and they were both in more formal contexts. The favouring of an analytic type could be attributed to influence from neighboring Balkan languages, as they have had, and some still have, an analytic future to serve as a model. Some caution is necessary here, for the analytic 'go'-future is common everywhere in colloquial Spanish, especially in Latin America, where it is preferred and where the synthetic ('have') future is increasingly rare.

Thus, these facts suggest that the *timing* of the separation of Latin American Spanish from Iberian Spanish coincided roughly with the separation of Judezmo, so that perhaps contact in each case favored such a development, pushing each variety of Spanish by chance, in the same direction. Yet, studies of Latin American Spanish (see Orozco 2007), show that Judezmo has gone significantly farther than any Spanish dialect in Latin America in favoring the analytic 'go'-future. This analytic structure is very frequent colloquially in Iberian Standard Spanish, but the synthetic future is more common in written texts. Thus, influence from its Balkan linguistic neighbors may well be responsible for the extent to which the analytic type is found in Judezmo. In this way, the Judezmo future, even if

not comporting to the widespread Balkan ‘want’-based type, nonetheless shows considerable relevance for the consideration of Judezmo as a Balkan Sprachbund language.

### 9.2.2.3 Syntax

We now move to a slightly different domain of grammar and examine the evidence from syntactic Balkanisms for the degree of convergence Judezmo shows to Balkan structural norms.

#### Object reduplication

In a construction that can be referred to as “object reduplication”, Balkan languages allow so-called “weak” object pronouns<sup>9</sup> to occur together with full objects, as in (6), from Greek; there are concomitant pragmatic effects associated with topicality and focus which the parenthetical translations attempt to capture:

- (6) a. *Me            θelis       emena?* (Greek)  
           me.ACC.WK want.2SG me.ACC.STRNG  
           ‘Do you want me?’ (= ‘Am I the one you want?’)
- b. *Tus            vlepume ton jani       ke ti maria* (Greek)  
           them.ACC.WK see.1PL the-Yani.ACC and the-Maria.ACC  
           ‘We see Yani and Maria.’ (= ‘Yani and Maria are the ones we see’)

Similar patterns can be found in Albanian, Aromanian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, among others.

Both Spanish and Judezmo allow for object reduplication and thus have sentences parallel to (6). However, Wagner (1914) observed that reduplicated object pronouns occur more frequently in Constantinople Judezmo than in Spanish, and Kramer & Perez-Leroux (2007) found much greater pragmatic conditioning for object reduplication in Judezmo than in Spanish. In (7a) and (8a) are given two Judezmo proverbs from Bitola with their Macedonian equivalents, (7b) and (8b), respectively, each one showing object reduplication typical of the Balkans but not of Spanish:

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<sup>9</sup> These pronominal forms are most usually referred to as “clitics”, but as I have argued elsewhere (Joseph 1988, Joseph 2002) that they are best treated as affixes, I use the more neutral term “weak pronoun” here (and correspondingly, “strong” for fuller forms).

- (7) a. *Il palu tuertu la lumeri lu indireche* (Judezmo)  
 the stick crooked the fire it.ACC straightens
- b. *Kriv stap ogn-ot go ispravuva* (Macedonian)  
 crooked stick fire.DEF it.ACC straightens  
 ‘A crooked staff is straightened in the fire’  
 (literally: “the crooked stick the fire it straightens”)<sup>10</sup>
- (8) a. *Al hamor kwandu mas l’ aroges mas alvante*  
 to.DEF donkey how.much more it.ACC beg.2SG more raises  
*las urezhes* (Judezmo)  
 the ears
- b. *Magare-to kolku poveke go moliš poveke gi*  
 donkey-DEF how.much more it.ACC beg.2SG more them.ACC  
*diga ushi-te* (Macedonian)  
 raises ears-DEF  
 ‘The more you beg the donkey, the more it raises its ears.’  
 (literally: “(to.)the donkey how.much more you beg it, (so much) more  
 it.raises its ears”).<sup>11</sup>

The Iberian Spanish equivalents of (7) and (8) either would not have the weak pronoun reduplicating the object, or if occurring with such a weak pronoun, would sound distinctly odd. Their presence in Balkan Judezmo is thus a good candidate for a feature that can be attributed to influence from Macedonian, or conceivably also Greek.

### Infinitives and finite subordinate clauses

Balkan languages show a reduction or total loss of the infinitive and the parallel expansion of finite subordinate clauses in functions that were once typical of infinitives, such as purpose clauses or complementation; these twin developments are seen most robustly in Aromanian, Greek, and Macedonian.

Balkan Judezmo preserves the Ibero-Romance infinitive (as noted in Joseph (1983: Chp. 7) for the Judezmo of Thessaloniki), still seen quite robustly in Iberian Spanish. Some examples are given in (9):

<sup>10</sup> This proverb occurs also in Greek, and also has object reduplication: *kirto ravdi to isioni i fotja*.

<sup>11</sup> This proverb also occurs in Greek, also with object reduplication: *oso to rotas to yaidaro, toso anevasi t’ aftja*.

- (9) a. *Tienes una vos mui buena para kantar* (Judezmo)  
 have.2SG a voice very good for sing.INF  
 ‘You-have a voice (that is) very good to-sing-with / for singing’
- b. *Ke pueda fazer* (Judezmo)  
 what can.3sg do.INF  
 ‘What might-he-be-able to-do?’
- c. *¿Puede recontar historia?* (Judezmo)  
 is.possible tell.INF story  
 ‘Can I tell the story?’ (literally: “Is-it-possible (for someone) to-tell (the) story?”)<sup>12</sup>

Thus, in this regard, Balkan Judezmo is decidedly un-Balkan in its syntax. However, there is some expansion of finite subordination where one might expect infinitives, and there is one aspect of the use of subjunctive mood forms in particular that parallels somewhat the syntax of finite verbs in Balkan languages that are co-territorial with Judezmo.

In particular, the Judezmo use in (10a) of the subjunctive (SBJV) by itself in modal questions, such as ‘When might we come to get you?’, has a direct parallel in Balkan languages (e.g. Greek and Macedonian, in (10b) and (10c), respectively) with a subordinating marker (SM):

- (10) a. *Kwando ke te vengamoz a tom-ar?* (Judezmo)  
 when SM you.ACC we.come.SBJV to take-INF
- b. *póte na rthúme na se párumē?* (Greek)  
 when SM we.come SM you.ACC we.take
- c. *Koga da ti dojdeme da te zemame?* (Macedonian)  
 when SM you.DAT we.come SM you.ACC we.take

The Judezmo in (10a) can be compared with its Iberian Spanish equivalent in (11), where a controlling verb (*quieres*) is needed to introduce the subjunctive of ‘come’, as is also the case in North African Judezmo:

- (11) *Cuándo quieres que vengamos a recog-er-te?*  
 when you.want SM we.come.SBJV to take-INF-you.ACC  
 ‘When do you want us to come to get you?’

<sup>12</sup> This example has impersonal active *puede* (as opposed to *se puede*, with a reflexive marker, in Standard Spanish), modeled on impersonal Macedonian *može* ‘it.can’ and/or Greek *borí* ‘it.can’.

Thus this bare use of the subjunctive without a controlling verb is a way in which finite subordination in Judezmo has moved in the direction of the norm for the Balkan Sprachbund languages. So even with the retention of an infinitive in Judezmo, the language shows Balkan-like syntax as far as subordination is concerned.

#### 9.2.2.4 Lexicon

Given that the lexicon is typically one of the first components of a language that is affected by language contact, in the form of loanwords (borrowings), it is not surprising to find a considerable number of Turkish culture words in Judezmo. Reflecting the fact that Turkish was the key language of urban areas in the Balkans during Ottoman rule, loanwords occur that cover administrative and religious terms, terminology for food, names for items of material culture, and the like. A sampling of such words is given in (12):<sup>13</sup>

- (12) *aboyadear* ‘to paint’ (Turkish *boya*- ‘paint’)  
*čorap* ‘stocking’ (Turkish *çorap*)  
*čorba* ‘soup’ (Turkish *çorba*)  
*jaği* ‘pilgrim’ (Turkish *hacı*)  
*jendek* ‘ditch’ (Turkish *hendek*)  
*talašis* ‘wood chips’ (Turkish *talaş*)  
*tavan* ‘ceiling’ (Turkish *tavan*)  
*teŋgere* ‘pot’ (Turkish *tencere*)

What is more telling regarding Judezmo and the Balkan lexicon is the penetration of a particular class of Balkan elements into the Judezmo lexicon. Friedman & Joseph (2014) argue that an essential tool for understanding the Balkan Sprachbund is the recognition of a class of conversationally-based loans which they refer to as “E.R.I.C.” loans, an acronym for loanwords that are “Essentially Rooted In Conversation”. The term is intended as a tribute to Eric Hamp, Balkanist par excellence, but it is a useful notion in itself and offers insight into the nature of language contact in the Balkans. Such loans are ones that go beyond simple informational needs and the object orientation of speakers of different languages interacting with one another. And borrowing them is not a matter of prestige or need per se, to focus on two of the most commonly cited motivations

<sup>13</sup> See Subak (1906) for other examples, as well as Friedman & Joseph (2014; 2021).

for borrowing. Rather, they are forms that can only be exchanged through actual conversational interaction; e.g., discourse particles, terms of address, greetings, exclamations, interjections, and the like, reflecting a more human orientation of speaker-to-speaker interactions. Friedman and I argue that the close and sustained sort of contact leading to this sort of lexical convergence is precisely the social context in which Sprachbund-like structural convergence can take place as well. Thus E.R.I.C. loans are indicative of Sprachbund-conducive conditions.

E.R.I.C. loans are all over the Balkans, as we document (Friedman & Joseph 2021: Chap.4), and while many are from Turkish, they are not limited to Turkish sources. Significantly, they are found in Judezmo. In (13), a sampling of such conversational loans is given:

- (13) *bre* ‘hey you’ (ultimately from Greek *more*; see Joseph 1997)  
*ayde* ‘c’mon!’ (ultimately from Turkish *haydi*)  
*ná* ‘here (it is); here ya go!’ (ultimately from Slavic; see Joseph 1981)  
*aman* ‘oh my; mercy!’ (ultimately from Arabic, but via Turkish (and Greek))  
*asiktar* ‘scram; go to hell’ (from Turkish, actually a stronger curse)

E.R.I.C. loans can also add color and affect to conversation; the highly expressive and mildly dismissive *m*-reduplication of Turkish, e.g. *kitap mitap* ‘books (*kitap*) and such’, is an example of such an affective borrowing into Judezmo:

- (14) *livro mivro* ‘books and such’  
*zapatos mapatos* ‘shoes and such’

In addition, borrowed bound morphology, usually felt to be fairly resistant to borrowing except under conditions of highly intensive contact, here involving suffixes of Turkish origin, can be found in Judezmo in words and expressions of both Hebrew and Spanish origin. Examples include the qualitative or concrete suffix *-lik*, adjectival *-li*, privative *-siz*, locational *-ana* (< *hane* ‘place (of)’), and onomastic *-oğlu* ‘son of’, all highly common in conversational contexts:

- (15) *hanukalik* ‘Chanukah present’  
*purimlik* ‘Purim gift’  
*benadamlik* ‘good deed’ ==> **ITALICS**  
*azlahali* ‘profitable’ / *azlahasiz* ‘useless’  
*perrana* ‘kennel’ (cf. *perro* ‘dog’)  
*gregana* ‘Greek quarter’  
*basinoğlu* ‘son of a urinal’ (a term of abuse)

E.R.I.C. loans are found all over the Balkans and bespeak an intense sort of contact at a very human and personal level. In this way, therefore, even the lexicon provides some insight into the degree of Balkan integration shown by Judezmo.

### 9.3 Causes of Judezmo convergence or failure to converge

Based on this material concerning Judezmo vis-à-vis the Balkan languages and Balkan linguistic features, it can be stated that, consistent with its later arrival in the Balkans, some of the older features that are widespread among Balkan languages are not found in Judezmo, for instance the absence of a postposed definite article. Just as the presence of a well-established definite article in Greek seemed to have averted the adoption of this particular Balkanism, so was the well-developed article in Iberian usage retained.

Further, it can be observed that local geography matters. For instance, there are ways in which Judezmo diverges phonologically from Balkan languages, including development of vowel nasalization for the Judezmo of Salonica with sequences of *a/o + n* developing into nasalized vowels word-finally. This runs counter to the usual claim of a “clear” vowel system with no overlay features such as length or nasalization.<sup>14</sup> But such divergences are actually to be expected, under the view of Balkan phonology as a highly *local* phenomenon. As Friedman (2008) puts it: “there is no Balkan phonology, rather only Balkan phonologies”. This is seen also in the shift from *ty/dy* (or palatalized dentals) to *ky/gy* (or palatalized velars) precisely in Bosnia and Macedonia; e.g., *Ingiltyerra* > *Ingilk'erra* ‘England’, where the same change took place in the local Slavic (and, in Macedonia, also Albanian) dialects. Moreover, some features found in Balkan Judezmo deviate in detail from other Balkan languages or have other possible origins, as with vowel raising.

Nonetheless, there are features of Balkan Judezmo that converge with those in Balkan languages that occur in the same place, so that there is some local linguistic assimilation – convergence – just not the more complete assimilation/convergence that other languages show.

Sociolinguistics serves to illuminate the situation here. With regard to the countervailing tendencies regarding the infinitive, for instance, we can note the

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<sup>14</sup> This feature is admittedly problematic as vowel length is found in a number of Albanian dialects, and nasalization characterizes Geg Albanian. However, this is a claim that is commonly made in the handbooks, e.g., Schaller (1975).

social — specifically, in this case here, religious — associations that non-infinitival languages have, in that Greek is largely associated with Orthodox Christianity, and Macedonian with official atheism. Moreover, Jewish languages in general are likely to preserve archaisms different from those of the co-territorial languages they are in contact with (cf. Wexler 1981). Given the general local and social segregation of Jewish communities, Jewish speakers would have less exposure to and less access to linguistic innovations found in the usage of non-Jewish speakers in the same area. Thus the persistence of the use of infinitives in at least some Balkan Judezmo varieties probably reflects a lower degree of contact between Jews and non-Jews in the Balkans than among the non-Jewish speakers of various languages in the region.

Furthermore, one has to reckon in the relative social isolation in which the Jewish speakers would have lived relative to their non-Jewish neighbors in Balkan cities. Without consistent, regular, and sustained contact with non-Jewish speakers of the local majority languages, Balkan Jews would not have had the opportunities nor have been subject to the pressures that could have led to full convergence of their speech with the linguistic structures of their non-Jewish neighbors. Relevant here too is the fact of one-way bilingualism: for the most part, Jews learned other languages but speakers of other languages did not learn Judezmo. This one-way bilingualism as far as Judezmo is concerned is reflected in the anecdotal tales contained in Cepenkov's (1972) 19<sup>th</sup> century collection of Macedonian materials. As reported by Friedman (1995) (and note also Friedman & Joseph (2014: Section 10.4)) out of 155 such tales, 24 show code-switches into Turkish, 4 into Greek, 3 into Albanian, 2 into Aromanian and 1 into Romani, but there are none into Judezmo. Characters in these tales representing all the other languages show code-switching into their ethnic languages — Greeks into Greek, Albanians into Albanian, and so on — the code-switching from the Macedonian matrix language of the tales that Jews exhibit is into Turkish, offering another indication of how marginalized speakers of Judezmo were in the Balkan linguistic social hierarchy.

## 9.4 Lessons for Balkan Linguistics from Judezmo

There are several lessons, in part of a methodological nature, that the case of Judezmo in the Balkans offers for those investigating the Balkan linguistic scene. First, a simple catalogue of features is not enough to offer the best insight into the Balkan Sprachbund; rather, a qualitative assessment of each feature is needed. The complex contact situation demands consideration of the social setting and the dynamics of interaction. Second, despite the attention on structural and

grammatical features in the handbooks on Balkan linguistics (e.g. Schaller 1975), the lexicon is not extraneous to phonology and morphosyntax when discussing Sprachbund phenomena and in fact complements it in important ways.

We can now address the motivating question for this investigation: is Judezmo a “Balkan language”? The answer is “Yes, in some respects, but no in other respects!” Such a response is perhaps unsatisfyingly uncertain, but maybe it is illuminating just because it is unsatisfying. In some instances, the sociolinguistic environment can be invoked as a reason for Judezmo’s divergence from other Balkan languages, as with infinitival developments. In other instances, chronology is responsible, as with the absence of a postpositive article, under the assumption that that feature is due to a substratum absorbed before Sephardim arrived in the Balkans, along with the recognition that the chronology of the entry of Sephardic Jews into the Balkans gave enough pre-Balkan-contact time for a (preposed) article system to develop in Spanish.

Thus Judezmo shows how easily some features can penetrate into a language, especially those aspects of the lexicon and morphosyntax most tied to conversation and to the habits of pronunciation acquired via heavy use of the socially dominant language. And, overall, the mix of Balkan features in Judezmo sharpens a sense of what it means to be peripheral within a Sprachbund. Some of the developments of Judezmo, with either sources or parallels elsewhere in Ibero-Romance, show that both timing and environment — here the Balkan chronotope — are crucial in helping to distinguish between that which is convergent and that which is parallel.

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