

## Language Revitalization: The case of Judeo-Spanish varieties in Macedonia

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Judeo-Spanish is a secondary dialect of the Spanish language having evolved from the ancient standard Spanish in the course of its expansion southwards. Although the language enjoys a heritage and presence in the Balkans of over five centuries, it is now facing language death – its acuteness depending on the region. In Macedonia,<sup>1</sup> the two varieties of Bitola and Skopje last documented by Kolonomos (1962) need to be labelled “moribund” or “nearly extinct”. This paper aims to point out some of the aspects relevant to the author’s doctoral research study, in which a documentation of the current language status of Judeo-Spanish in Macedonia is envisaged. The deliberations look at the reasons for language endangerment and at the same time evaluate possibilities and opportunities for language revitalization – what priorities are to be set, what role do linguists and especially the community play, what is the approach, what are skills, methods, and steps to be taken into consideration to ensure not only a documentation of the language, but also and foremost its conservation and revitalization.

**1. INTRODUCTORY NOTES.** The year of 1492 marks a milestone in Iberian and world history not only against the background of Christopher Columbus’ discoveries and the publication of Nebrija’s *Gramática de la Lengua Castellana*, but also it brought about the re-establishment of political and religious unity in Spain. Along with it came the edict of expulsion enunciated by the *Reyes Católicos* on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1492,<sup>2</sup> towards the Jewish community, whereby, if they did not convert to Christianity, they were expelled from the country. This contributed decisively to the emergence and development of a variety that had conserved traits of a language which, before the expulsion, had differed little from Spanish despite its distinctive Jewish features; traits that now generated the core of a new language: Judeo-Spanish (Harris 1994: 65).

After their expulsion from Spain, Jews settled in the neighboring country of Portugal, where the same edict reached them in 1497 as a consequence of the intermarriage of the royal families. This again prompted them to leave the country to Amsterdam in particular, but also France, Italy, and later Great Britain (Born 2012: 126). Jews from South Spain

<sup>1</sup> The denomination “Macedonia” does not imply the notion of the geographical territory of Macedonia divided between Bulgaria, Greece and Macedonia, it henceforth refers to the current territory of the Republic of Macedonia, admitted to the United Nations under the provisional reference of the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

<sup>2</sup> This edict was revoked in Spain no earlier than 1968 (Bollée 2003: 118).

mainly emigrated to North Africa, where the Judeo-Spanish variety *Hakitia* emerged. The majority followed the invitation issued by Sultan Bayazid II to settle in the regions of the Ottoman Empire, where they were granted religious freedom. A considerable proportion emigrated there from Castile and Northern Spain, a phenomenon that can be observed in the denominations of the respective national synagogues, as well as in the lexis and phonology expressed with Catalan, Aragonese (both spoken in Northern Spain), and Portuguese components (Wagner 1990: 38f.).

The most significant Sephardic communities emerged in the Balkans, the main centers being Sarajevo, Saloniki, Monastir (today's Bitola), Constantinople and Smyrna (Born 2012: 126, Wagner 1990: 38.). In some of those communities, the local Balkan Jews adapted to their new neighbors, forsaking their own language (Greek (Born 2012: 126) or German (Wagner 1990: 38)) and adopting the Judeo-Spanish vernacular.

Imported into its new homelands, this language however underwent an assimilation directed towards the respective regional variety (Greek, Turkish, etc.), mostly manifested in lexical terms. Phonetic-phonological changes experienced by the Spanish language on the Iberian Peninsula during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century did not exercise any influence on Judeo-Spanish (Born 2012: 126). Communities based in Western Europe stood in constant contact with the Spanish mother country, and as a result these communities followed the development of the Castilian Spanish, whereas the Balkan communities conserved much more ancient stages of the language (Bunis 1991: 7f.).

Although the Judeo-Spanish varieties enjoy a heritage of five centuries, they are now facing language death – its acuteness depends on the region and reasons which will be elaborated below. A look into the research to date suggests that the Judeo-Spanish varieties in the Balkans are the least prevalent in linguistic research. The largest present-day survey for languages of the world – *Ethnologue* – locates the variety under the denomination “Ladino” as prevalent in Israel, but also existent in Greece, Turkey, Puerto Rico, and the United States. A Balkan variety is referred to as a dialect.<sup>3</sup> When it comes to Macedonia, out of the formerly smaller communities such as Kumanovo, Veles, Strumica, Gevgelija, and the bigger, thriving Jewish communities such as Bitola, Skopje, Štip (Kolonomos 1962: 22), only Bitola and Skopje are still noteworthy (Ibd.: 22) and subject of the author's doctoral research study.

Given the fact that the last thorough research was undertaken by Kolonomos in 1962 and the circumstances whereby the field research in the Judeo-Spanish varieties in Macedonia is still rather in its fledgling stages (field access, documentation, ageing of community members), the following survey will be based on scholarly findings rather than field results at this given point. Nevertheless, it aims to provide insights into reasons for the endangerment of Judeo-Spanish as well as tendencies, perspectives, and practical steps of its documentation and conservation based on the needs expressed by the local community.

**2. LANGUAGE DEATH.** “There is agreement among linguists who have considered the situation that over half of the world's languages are moribund, i.e. not effectively being passed on to the next generation.” (Foundation for Endangered Languages 1996: 3).<sup>4</sup> This is certainly the case when it comes to Judeo-Spanish in Macedonia.

Taking *Ethnologue* into consideration and basing field observation upon the suggestions of the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) (Lewis & Simons

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/lad> (10 December, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> *Iatiku*, Newsletter of the Foundation for Endangered Languages #2, [http://www.ogmios.org/ogmios/-iatiku\\_02.pdf](http://www.ogmios.org/ogmios/-iatiku_02.pdf) (10 December, 2015).

2010),<sup>5</sup> which provides concise labelling and description of the 13 levels of language status, Judeo-Spanish varieties in Macedonia find themselves labelled “moribund” (“The only remaining active users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older.”<sup>6</sup>) or “nearly extinct” (“The only remaining users of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.”<sup>7</sup>). Considering the fact that *Ethnologue* allocates to the language, globally known as “Ladino”,<sup>8</sup> an educational language status, the language being “in vigorous use, with standardization and literature being sustained through a widespread system of institutionally supported education.”<sup>9</sup>, there is striking divergence between the global notion of the minority language and its status in Macedonia, given that there are not more than a handful of native speakers in the country. A wide-spread system of institutionally supported education is not existent and due to the language status not envisaged at this point. The Directorate for Promotion and Development of Languages in the Education for the Ethnic Minorities lists the languages of the Turkish, Bosniaks, Serbians, Vlachs, and Roma as the languages to be developed, Judeo-Spanish or “Ladino” is not included in this list. It is hoped that the advice of the OSCE to the government of Macedonia, whereby the preservation and promotion of a multi-cultural society is encouraged not only in words but in deeds,<sup>10</sup> will set a precedent for institutionally supported education in the case of Judeo-Spanish. However, such a development seems fairly remote at this point.

Both the overall development of Judeo-Spanish in Macedonia along with the endangerment of the language and its official recognition must lead to the categorization elaborated above.

How, then, does such a categorization come about? What is language death? A language is declared dead when no one speaks it anymore, and it is “effectively dead when there is only one speaker left, with no member of the younger generation interested in learning it.” (Crystal 2000: 11). However, if there are two or more speakers, it is the context in which the population is included that must be evaluated. For example, isolation and density of a population play a vital role in the discussion about language endangerment (Ibd.: 12ff.). Crystal (2000) states that any discussion of language death must be seen in the following perspective:

<sup>5</sup> <http://www-01.sil.org/simonsg/preprint/EGIDS.pdf> (10 December, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ethnologue.com/about/language-status> (10 December, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ethnologue.com/about/language-status> (10 December, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> The scientific denomination is “Judeo-Spanish” – despite some controversy: A denomination “Judeo-German” does not exist anymore, the term “Yiddish” has been established for a long time. Moreover, the term “Judeo-Spanish” does not take into consideration the importance of the Portuguese language, since with the reference to language fusion and affiliation both Spanish and Portuguese play a significant role (Faingold 1989: 26). “Djudezmo” concerns the traditional, everyday vernacular (Bollée 2003: 117f.) within the Jewish communities settled in the region of the ancient Ottoman empire (Bunis 1991: 7ff.). From a philological point of view, the term is correct, yet it has not managed to establish itself since no adjective can be derived from it. Speaking of “Sephardic”, originally religious ordinances are referred to and it does not imply that all Sephardim are Hispanophone (Faingold 1989: 26). “Ladino” designates the literal literary language of religious and liturgical translations, thus meeting solely sacral needs (Bollée 2003: 117f., Born 2012: 126). For some linguists, “Ladino” is methodologically opposed to the written sub-variety of “Judeo-Spanish” inasmuch as it stands in strong lexical as well as mainly morphological and syntactic accordance to Hebrew (Bollée 2003: 177f.). Speakers themselves and numerous researchers use the terms analogically as a synonym for “Judeo-Spanish” (Born 2012: 126). Besides that, the term is very common in Anglophone scholarly literature. It is also the term with which many Jewish communities are familiar.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ethnologue.com/about/language-status> (10 December, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/68708> (10 December, 2015).

[I]t is evident that a very small number of languages account for a vast proportion of the world's population (...). The 8 languages over 100 million (Mandarin, Spanish, English, Bengali, Hindi, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese) have nearly 2.4 billion speakers between them (...). If we continued the analysis downwards, we would eventually find that just 4

Every part of the world has its own underlying, varying conditions, a population number alone can thus give but generalized, insufficient insight and information about the degree of language death.

**2.1. REASONS FOR LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT AND DEATH IN THE CASE OF JUDEO-SPANISH VARIETIES IN MACEDONIA.** The range of factors leading to the dying of a language is vast and mostly there is a combination of reasons. A global overview over language death cannot be given (Crystal 2000: 70), but in case studies these factors can be easily identified. The following provides a summary list of causes of why languages disappear:

- Physical endangerment of a community of speakers: natural causes such as earthquakes, floods, etc.; famine, drought; diseases; exploitation of resources; conflict and war (Crystal 2000: 70–76).
- Endangerment of culture: assimilation; domination of one culture over the other; loss and lack of prestige of a language (Crystal 2000: 76–88).

There are many more factors that are conducive to language endangerment, as in the case of the Judeo-Spanish varieties of Macedonia. In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, numerous lesser Sephardic communities in the Balkans found themselves under the influences of secularization, assimilation and emigration (Born 2012: 126). With the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, modernization found its way into the Balkan region and eliminated extensively Jewish life-forms, which is reflected in the replacement of the language of the Sephardim with the respective national language (Born 2012: 126). Besides these impacts of an incipient nationalism in the Balkan states, Harris (1994: 197f.) describes further factors that proved conducive to the decline of Judeo-Spanish:

- Decrease of prestige forced by the national governments and at last carried by the Sephardim themselves through negligence or renunciation;
- Israelization;
- Americanization;
- Jewish life now following an Ashkenazi standard;
- Establishment of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, in the course of which the French influence became indispensable;
- Lack of language cultivation and standardization on the part of language academies or respective central institutions;
- Indifference on the part of the Spanish mother country and eventually the final breach with Spain;

- Application of the Hebrew alphabet and the Rashi script in lieu of the Latin alphabet;
- Absence of prestigious Judeo-Spanish literature as well as ultimately the reduction of ranges of speech from a formerly powerful language of economy towards fewer linguistic domains, focused on rather private life.

The reduction to the communicative spaces to private life clearly escalated alongside the growing threat deriving from anti-Jewish policies introduced by German occupiers and collaborators in situ. Speaking the language was avoided so as not to be identified as member of the Jewish community. The decline of Jewish way of life, language, and culture culminated drastically in the persecutions and the deportation of Jews to Treblinka.

In March 1943, German SS and Bulgarian authorities deported 7,144 Jews to Treblinka from Bulgarian-occupied Macedonia and 4,000 Jews from occupied Thrace. (...) Some 900,000 Jews and approximately 2,000 Roma (...) were murdered at Treblinka. There were fewer than 100 known survivors. (Mais 2011: 126)<sup>11</sup>

98% of the Jewish population in Macedonia was thus almost entirely annihilated (Quintana Rodriguez 1997: 47f.). In consequence of the genocide, no nameable Judeo-Sephardic influence can be documented in ancient thriving centers such as Bitola. Small groups of speakers are observed in Istanbul, Israel, Latin America, and the USA (Bollée 2003: 117f., Born 2012: 126), which are mostly from the older generations. Among younger generations the language falls prey to assimilation in the particular regional language. No monolingual Judeo-Spanish speakers are listed, and it is in a minor share of communities where it performs the function of a primary language. In 1979 already, Malinowski reported upon his field research in Israel: “I was unable [...] in spite of repeated inquiries to find any informant under twenty years of age.” (Berschin 2005: 21, after Malinowski 1979: 165). Today, after over 30 years, we must make the assumption that a Judeo-Spanish speaker is likely to be at least 70+. Judeo-Spanish, thus, looks back on its vast heritage, and is at the same time confronted with its extinction. The UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger locates Judeo-Spanish under the denomination “Judezmo” among the languages severely endangered in their vitality.<sup>12</sup> The total population amounts to 112,130 speakers worldwide.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. ASPECTS AND STAGES OF LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION IN THE CASE OF JUDEO-SPANISH IN MACEDONIA. To address the on-going linguistic loss in times of standardization and unification, measures need to be taken to prevent a fatal decrease in the vitality

<sup>11</sup> There has been discussion on the validity of a Bulgarian involvement in the deportations. It is true that this question does not have a simple answer. Almost 50,000 Jews from Ancient Bulgaria escaped the deportation to the concentration camps and survived World War II – thanks to numerous, courageous interventions on the part of their fellow countrymen. The synod of the Bulgarian orthodox church, several deputies of the parliament as well as the former deputy President of Parliament Peschew protested against the extradition. Nevertheless, 11,343 Jews from the territories that were assigned to Bulgaria by Hitler (Thrace in Greece and Yugoslavian Macedonia) were not able to escape and were eventually deported – an incident which was confirmed by the German police attaché in Sofia at that time and is nowadays assessed correct by the Jewish Community of Bulgaria. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/holocaust-romantische-luege-oder-heldentat-1228323-p2.html> (10 December, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/index.php?hl=en&page=atlasmap> (10 December, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/lad> (10 December, 2015). This number is from 2013. Bollée (2003) reports about 130,000 speakers and upon 160,000 speakers ten years before (Bollée 2003: 117f.). The decline is thus remarkable.

of communities and further loss of cultural knowledge. It is indeed to be expected that Judeo-Spanish will soon not be spoken any more in Macedonia. Yet there is interest in linguists' involvement within the local community – as well as a need for such involvement being expressed at a global level. Crystal (2000) asks the question “Why should we care?” if there is a far-ranging belief that sharing one single language would foster peace, unity, and global understanding. He answers this question with the need for diversity and the expression of identity, pointing out that languages are repositories of history and contribute to the sum of human knowledge, quite apart from the fact that they are interesting in themselves (Crystal 2000: 32-65).

How can a revitalization of the Judeo-Spanish language in Macedonia come about? What are the steps and stages? What is the role of the linguist and most of all the community itself?

Given the worldwide complexity of problems, the case of Judeo-Spanish can rely on numerous case studies carried out so far. These have shown that the loss or conservation of a language depends greatly on the involvement of indigenous communities, local support groups, and outside bodies. Linguists have shown increasing interest in language revitalization particularly since the 1990s, and yet it is not only about “doing something”, but utmost importance and deliberation must be dedicated to *what* is to be done – or initially, what needs to be taken into consideration.

**3.1. PRIORITIZATION.** Prioritization is indispensable in the face of constraints and restraints of time, personnel, and resources. According to Ostler (1997, after Crystal 2000), “The first step in language rescue must be an informative assessment of a language’s current situation.” (Crystal 2000: 92) The predictability of language vitality depends solely on elaborate data (Crystal 2000: 92). In the vastness of information it needs to be clear what kind of information is envisaged: Besides the number of speakers, the context of speaker fluency, accuracy, and age levels needs to be taken into consideration to assure adequate evaluation of linguistic vitality, the possibility of revitalization, and its consolidation towards continuity (Crystal 2000: 92).

Consequently, the question needs to be raised as to which information is valid information and which is irrelevant information. A unified framework cannot exist given the extensive parameters exerting their endangering influence on a given language. The framework alongside which language revival can take place will greatly depend on the attitude of a community and its aspiring intentions towards its language (Crystal 2000: 92). Despite the acute need and exigency of a language-conserving framework, an attitude of haphazard collection of empirical data must be avoided, as well as postponing the elaboration of a framework until all the facts are gathered – the former proving short-term and inefficient, the latter inhibiting (Crystal 2000: 93–94). This typological framework then leads to the classification of a language in the light of demography, sociology, psychology, history, politics, geography, education, religion, economy, and technology – broadened by external factors such as local, regional, national, and extra-national influence, all of which are based on case studies (Crystal 2000: 94), all leading to a foundation based on facts and a theoretical frame of reference.

**3.2. CONSCIOUSNESS.** Another aspect to be taken into consideration is the lack of consciousness of languages in general and endangered languages in particular, in consequence of their abstractness and complexity on different levels, which is shown in the following account.

I am Rapa Nui, and, of course, I cannot speak for all Rapa Nui. But I can speak about what I see happening on my island (...). First, the people of Rapa Nui are not free to do what we want: we are controlled by another government, the government of Chile. This government has not always been kind to us or allowed us our self-determination. Because of this, our language is dying. I want to do something about it, but there is resistance from many different quarters. The Chilean government and sometimes our own elected officials do not really support our efforts to revitalize our language. Also, linguists and anthropologists have come to study us. While we appreciate their efforts, we want to control our own diversity. In addition, some efforts have created more division in our community. (...) Language revitalization should start in the home and be a community effort. It should be everybody's concern. The people of Rapa Nui need to come together and decide for themselves what the future should be. (Hotus Tuki 2009: 199f.)

Hotus Tuki (2009) thus refers to several variables essential to the process of language revitalization: Conducive political conditions (when it comes to the preservation of ethnic and cultural rights, willingness of financial support, among others), experts with disposition towards language documentation and dissemination, and the community itself. Consciousness is thus indispensable on every level. What that implies in terms of a community and its contribution to language conservation as well as linguists' assistance is to be looked into more thoroughly below.

**3.3. INTERDEPENDENCE OF LINGUIST AND COMMUNITY.** It seems that linguistic research has been carried out without consideration for community's needs for a long time. Tsunoda (2006) confirms a change in culture, whereby communities now benefit more directly from research and see their personal and intellectual rights being respected. Despite the academic exigency to document endangered languages (and the awareness of such in the first place), meeting the needs of a community must be ensured and go hand in hand (Tsunoda 2006: 228).

Field work thus is no longer simply a professional task a researcher is responsible for; it rather implies a role that follows given ethics. Putting academic success over the integrity of a local community is one of the traits of exploitation. In the synopsis given by Tsunoda (2006), basing the insights on documentation aims of different scholars, the following aims are prevalent: (i) to satisfy academic curiosity, (ii) to foster academic success, (iii) to secure linguistic data, (iv) to ensure cultural heritage of humankind, and (v) to contribute to cultural heritage of the communities for their benefit, e.g. with the aim of language revitalization. So far, the linguistic concerns seem to rest largely on deliberations which are remote from the needs of the community. An attitude of having the right rather than the privilege to carry out field research in a respective community is not conducive and rather limiting to any variable that plays a role in language documentation and conservation (Tsunoda 2006: 218).

Nevertheless, communities have started to express their displeasure towards merely external influence and have begun to formulate a catalogue of imperatives:

- (a) The community should decide who is allowed to conduct research there (...). (...) A request for permission needs to provide information on (i) the language to be investigated, (ii) the aim and significance of the planned research, (iii) the topics of the research, (iv) method of the research, (v) method

of publication of the research results, and (vi) whether the research will be returned to the community, and how? That is, “academic theft” is no longer allowed. (b) The community, and not the researchers, should choose research projects. (...) The community may assign a research topic which is different from the one initially envisaged by the researcher. (c) Researchers should inform the community of what is happening (...). (d) Researchers should collaborate with community members (...), and should not marginalize community members in research. However, some community members “want to do the work themselves without help from foreign experts” (...). (f) It is not sufficient for researchers to publish for their own benefits (...). They should not monopolize knowledge (...). They should benefit the community in question, by giving back the research results to the latter (...). Thus, (i) research results should help the education of the children of the community (...). (ii) Linguists should train community members in linguistics (...) – so that the latter can conduct research. (iii) Linguists should aid language revitalization activities (...). (iv) Research results should be fed into the general education system (...). (Tsunoda 2006: 219-220)

With reference to the community in Macedonia, certainly the allowance to conduct research on Judeo-Spanish has been given. So far, this permission focuses on Skopje in default of access to the community in Bitola. The language to be investigated is Judeo-Spanish. The dissertation research upon which this paper is based does not aim at a language-geographic description of the Judeo-Spanish in the Balkan countries, in particular consideration of Macedonia, since this was undertaken by Quintana Rodriguez (1997, 2006), neither does it envisage further research upon the phonological characteristics of the Judeo-Spanish in a continuum. In fact, a description of the current status of Judeo-Spanish in Macedonia is to be attempted, the more so as Kolonomos thoroughly and exclusively described the two varieties of Bitola and Skopje in her dissertation in 1962. The selective description of the language enclaves of Bitola and Skopje does not derive as much from an attitude of dependence on previous research, but is based on the reality whereby the formerly dynamic center of Bitola has the most thriving cultural heritage and the community of Skopje the largest and most active Jewish Community in Macedonia. The central questions of this investigation thus relate to the current language status of the Judeo-Spanish and its varieties in Macedonia. The most significant group of speakers is nowadays to be situated in Skopje, out of which some are to be attributed genealogically to the community of Bitola. Is it thus possible that assimilation has taken place in Macedonia whereby both varieties have assimilated towards a “Skopje variety”?

If phonetics and lexis have already been thoroughly studied and documented, what insights can be formulated about syntax? What influence does language contact exert on the syntactic structure of the respective languages when a Romance language develops in a non-Romance environment? What is structurally or typologically of Romance origin, where do Balkanisms can be observed, where is language innovation to be located? It is in this context that the interrelation of Romance and Balkan linguistics will reveal its scope, since so far Judeo-Spanish has been surveyed mostly under the lens of Romance Studies (Kramer (2007).

Hand in hand with these linguistic questions, light needs to be shed on the benefits for the local community to such a degree as to frame tendencies for its language, as to whether there is a possibility of language conservation and revitalization in a community



as small as the one in Macedonia and how respective measures could look like. In personal contact with the Jewish Community of Sofia and Skopje as well as in conversations with the Director of Centropa,<sup>14</sup> Dr. Serotta, a consistently homogeneous opinion was confirmed, namely that there is the desire to actively maintain the language and to make it subject of scientific research after a long period of denial, which reflects the need to hide the Jewish identity and protect the members of the community in times of growing nationalism.

A description of the language should therefore be realized in close connection with the local community, taking its needs into account. In consultation with the current president of the Jewish Community of Skopje, Berta Romano-Nikolic, it was found that it would be ideal to offer the study of Judeo-Spanish as part of the community curriculum. Such a study should not be overly based on the aspect of language itself, rather on conveying Sephardic culture to foster an affirmative attitude within the community towards the reassuming of an identity that has been lost and towards the understanding that language is part of culture (Crystal 2000: 119). The preparation of language material should proceed in close collaboration between the linguist and the president as well as the secretary of the Jewish Community, who is well versed in linguistics and thus able to perform the connection between external and internal variables in relation to the community.

There are certainly innumerable other factors to be observed, especially when it comes to public awareness, not to speak of the political scale. However, one major step has already been taken in terms of cinematography, when in 2012 the film “The Third Half”<sup>15</sup> was introduced to a worldwide public. It depicts the true story around the football team FC Macedonia and its Jewish coach in the Bulgarian occupation zone of Macedonia during World War II. One of the languages spoken in the film besides the local Slavic languages, English, and German is Judeo-Spanish, which is vividly present. In Macedonia, the film stayed in the theatres over a period of months and proved exceedingly successful, which certainly lead to increased awareness among the local population as well as to win praise from Jewish groups.

### 3.4. METHODS OF RESEARCH AND PRACTICAL STEPS.

3.4.1. APPROACH. Bovern (2011) draws attention to a special approach when it comes to highly endangered languages. Documentation cannot really be built up over a period of time, yet certain temptations should be avoided, such as recording raw data as quickly as possible without being alert to its nature. It is beneficial to identify the number of speakers, their fluency as well as their language skills at the earliest stage. A suggested scenario in which the project could focus on the recording of elderly fluent speakers, which then could be trained in translation, transcription, etc. (Bovern 2011: 469-470) will not be performable in Macedonia anymore. It is highly challenging to record the speakers, who are but a handful and belong to the generation of at least 80+. The link between this generation and the community who expressed the wish to resume the study of the language of their ancestors will have to be a linguist or a member of another Judeo-Spanish speaking community, ideally in a dialect that approximates to the varieties of Macedonia.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.centropa.org/> (10 December, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.thethirdhalf-movie.com/> (10 December, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Geographically speaking, both varieties of Judeo-Spanish belong to different isogloss bundles, based on their phoneme inventory: (1) the North-Western group (center: Sarajevo) including Bitola, which was not influenced by any language innovation (conservation of the consonant group *-rd-*, no reduction of */rr/*); (2) the South-Eastern group (centers: Istanbul, Saloniki) including Skopje, situated in a continuum that discloses but

Moreover, the principle of simplifying complex material later on rather than the other way around should prevail (Bowerman 2011: 470).

3.4.2. SKILLS. Language documentation and conservation requires skills that differ from general linguistic training. Those are based on descriptive linguistics and directed towards typological and structural matters. Jukes (2011) suggests that beyond basic skilled phonological and morphosyntactic analysis, an amply diversified knowledge of grammatical and other linguistic analysis is needed (Jukes 2011: 424).

Skills relevant to practical fieldwork can be divided into five areas: linguistic theory, fieldwork methods, methods of language conservation, area studies, and field skills (e.g. ethics, see above) (Jukes 2011: 425). Documentation skills that are necessary include proficiency in information and communication technology, and applied linguistics such as orthography development, lexicography, translation, pedagogy, language politics, and advocacy, among others (Jukes 2011: 426).

3.4.3. METHODOLOGY. On the basis of Austin (2006), Endruschat & Ferreira (2011: 15) formulate the different phases of documentation as follows:

- Project design
- Negotiation with the community
- Acquisition of financial support
- Collection (field research) and processing of data
- Formulation of *outputs*
- Evaluation and final report.

On the technical side, primary data stand in the center of any kind of language documentation and represent the communicational reality of a language community. They can consist of audio and video data, interviews, written sources of such a community as well as metalinguistic affirmations on the part of the speakers about their own language. A corpus of linguistic data will always seek to represent the community in its typology, relating primary data to the context in which they are recorded, analyzed, and archived. These metadata are added data (referring for instance to persons, situations, technical information, etc.) and allow insights into the project realization as well as into the context of the realization of a linguistic occurrence. To complete the corpus, primary data need to be accompanied by annotations whereby the data are transcribed, translated, and embedded into a specific linguistic context (phonetics, prosody, syntax, etc) (Endruschat & Ferreira 2011: 15–20).

Primary data for the documentation of the Judeo-Spanish of Macedonia will, on the one hand, be elicited from handwritten and/or printed texts found in archives, libraries as well as in private collections of literature, and comprise religious and secular texts, poetry, drama, novels and tales, folklore, journals, statutes, etc., and on the other hand, from transcribed interviews. It is to be evaluated to what extent there is divergence between the written and the spoken language.

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few differences, which are manifest in the frequency of the realization of the initial /f/ (Quintana Rodriguez 1997: 47f.).

As the case may be, interviews can also result in case studies. It lies in the subject nature of the dissertation envisaged that presumably there will be very few interview partners at the disposal of the researcher. The advantage of this is that a case can offer valuable insights both into its own entirety and complexity as well as being able to be set into a wider context, and thus lead to more detailed and profound findings (Mayring 2002: 42).

For access into the field,<sup>17</sup> several interview methods have proved feasible. The interview as a tool for data collection is conducive to gathering answers to the enquiries about the number of speakers, syntactic structures in the discourse as well as tendencies of vitality and perspectives of language conservation fairly close to the context. The following interview methods are envisaged:

#### Problem oriented, semi-structured interview

In this open form of interview, the interviewee is asked to elaborate upon given topics, problem statements, etc. Central questions particularly refer to tendencies and could include the following:

- How does the interviewee assess the language status?
- What are, following personal assessment, the reasons for the decline of the language? What is the interviewee's position towards this matter?
- Is there interest in language conservation?
- How could such a language conservation be brought about?

#### Narrative interview

Narrative interviews, which allow for subjective questions asked by the interviewee him/herself, have proved to be less inhibited. Interviewees do not feel confined to the interest of the research with which they are approached. Besides, narratives mostly follow a universally applied framework, whereby the interview is structured in an organic way, when required with the interviewer's minor assistance. Such natural structuring is conducive to the syntactic analysis.

#### Group discussion

When, in a group, several subjective questions are asked, this interaction leads to interesting and always dynamic contexts such as faith, community life or identity. In addition, conversations become more open in terms of discourse and register.

The above mentioned interview scenarios have already taken place within the Jewish Community of Sofia, Bulgaria, and are to be applied to the community in Skopje. Should the linguist's/interviewer's proficiency of Judeo-Spanish not be sufficient there is the possibility of formulating interview questions and affirmations in Spanish and the interviewees on their part answer in "Ladino". So far there have not been any challenges in comprehension. The interviewees are not proficient in Spanish on their own account, hence a linguistic assimilation to the interviewer's language is very unlikely – which would falsify the data collection along with its evaluation drastically. In any case there are persons available who could, in the interviewer's stead, conduct the interview in Judeo-Spanish.

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<sup>17</sup> The respective data acquisition methods follow Mayring (2002).

**4. CONCLUSION.** The research of the Judeo-Spanish varieties and its relics in Macedonia brings with it obvious benefits for the field of linguistics. The questions about (i) current language status, (ii) the influence which languages in contact exert on one another specifically in the domain of syntax, and especially when a Romance language evolves in a non-Romance environment, (iii) typological and structural identification, (iv) language innovation, and (v) language assimilation within the varieties of Macedonia, all of which to be studied following a corpus-based perspective, combine language documentation with contact-linguistic evaluation.

How can such research, which is valuable in itself, benefit the Jewish Community of Skopje and beyond that ideally contribute to the heritage of Judeo-Spanish as a whole? Simply answering the question about the tendencies for Judeo-Spanish in Macedonia will not suffice, and neither will a linguistic survey presented to a linguistically rather untrained audience. The language documentation needs to disclose the possibilities of pro-active language conservation and revitalization in a community as small as Macedonia and to identify steps that can be taken in ownership of the process.

The community has already taken one decisive step, expressing the wish for language classes in Judeo-Spanish focusing on the aspect of culture. What has dwindled along the last decades can now return to the common awareness of a community. Despite the broad public attention attributed to the Jewish Community of Macedonia with the release of “The Third Half”, it seems more sustainable to raise consciousness at grassroots level within the community itself and then proceed with efforts within the larger public.

It is evident that, at this stage, there is a necessity for external assistance since the number of native speakers is vanishingly small and their age around 80+. Two generations later there will be no local speakers who could carry out the endeavor in situ. In agreement with the Jewish community of Skopje, this task was bestowed upon the author,<sup>18</sup> since her linguistic training includes Romance linguistics with special focus on ancient Portuguese and Spanish (inclusive of studies of Judeo-Spanish), Oriental Studies and now Slavic Linguistics. It is hoped that this knowledge will contribute greatly and fruitfully to the enhancement of Judeo-Spanish within and outside Macedonia.

In an atmosphere of consultation and mutual assistance, where eventually the linguist will play a consulting and assisting role, while the community has ownership and sovereignty over its own endeavors, the response to sustainable language conservation seems to be encouraging.

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