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## SOME LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF THE JUDEO-SPANISH DIALECT OF MONASTIR

### Abstract

The paper presents the linguistic features of the Judeo-Spanish dialect of Monastir (Bitola). The features are excerpted from Žamila Kolonomos' collection *Poslovice, izreke i priče sefardskih Jevreja Makedonije* and a tale by Avram Romano-Buki. The given examples illustrate such features as phonology, phonetics, lexis, morphology and syntax.

**Key words:** Judeo-Spanish, Monastir, Bitola, Žamila Kolonomos, Avram-Romano-Buki, linguistics

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The linguistic material of the paper is mainly based on Žamila Kolonomos' collection of oral tradition *Poslovice, izreke i priče sefardskih Jevreja Makedonije* (*Proverbs, Sayings and Tales of the Sephardi Jews of Macedonia*) published in Belgrade in 1978 by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia. The collection is divided into four parts: *Rifranis di Bitola*, *Rifranis di Skopje*, *Kunsežas di Bitola* and *Kunsežas di Skopje*. For the purposes of this paper, only the Monastir (Bitola) dialect is discussed. In order to enrich the analysis, the examples from Kolonomos' collection will be compared with the text of a tale, despite the fact that it is not a traditional one, printed in the Sarajevian magazine *Jevrejski glas* (1932, No 17-18). The tale *Monastir es sjempri Monastir* was written by a Sarajevian Sephardi Jew, Avram Romano-Buki, but, as it is pointed out below the title, in *djalekto monastirli*. Romano-Buki had spent several years in Bitola as a rabbi until 1943<sup>1</sup>, which explains his knowledge of the local Sephardi dialect. Nevertheless, unlike the texts from Kolonomos' collection, I treat Romano's language as a stylised dialect. The aim of the comparison is to see to what extent the stylised text departs from the genuine dialect.

The analysis shows some basic linguistic features in terms of phonology, phonetics, morphology, lexis and syntax. Judeo-Spanish examples found in both texts are often compared to the forms used in the contemporary Spanish (Castilian) language. The spelling used in the examples is the original spelling from the sources.

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<sup>1</sup> More information about Avram Romano-Buki's profile and works, see: Muhamed Nezirović, *Jevrejsko-španjolska književnost*, Sarajevo 1992, 573-585.

## 1. Phonology and Phonetics

### Consonants:

- △ the distinction between /b/ and bilabial /β/ or labiodental /v/; **(Kolonomos)** *arvul* : Cast. *arból* – 'a tree', *lovu* : Cast. *lobo* – 'a wolf' // **(Buki)** *bivan* : Cast. *vivan* – 'they live' (the subjunctive form), *palavre* : Cast. *palabra* – 'a word', *uzava* : Cast. *usaba* – 'he used'
  - △ the preservation of the archaic consonant /v/ in the position before the consonant /d/ : **(Kolonomos)** *sivda* : Cast. *ciudad* – 'a city', *devde* : Cast. *deuda* – 'debt'. No examples were found in Romano's tale
  - △ the lack of the interdental spirant /θ/ or *seseo* with the distinction of the sonority feature between /s/ and /z/: **(Kolonomos)** *kurason* : Cast. *corazón* – 'a heart', *serke* : Cast. *cerca* – 'close' // **(Buki)** *dizir* : Cast. *decir* – 'to say', *sene* : Cast. *cena* – 'dinner'
- Seseo* feature appears in every part of the Hispanic world, where the standard language had weaker representation, so that is why it also appears in the Sephardi diaspora;
- △ the sonority of the intervocalic /s/: **(Kolonomos, Buki)** *kaze* : Cast. *casa* – 'home', *fazer* : Cast. *hacer* – 'to do', *koze* : Cast. *cosa* – 'a thing', *meze* : Cast. *mesa* – 'a table'
  - △ the preservation of the archaic consonant /š/: **(Kolonomos)** *akeše* : Cast. *queja* – 'to complain' // **(Buki)** *deši* : Cast. *dejé* – 'I left'
  - △ the preservation of the archaic consonant /ž/: **(Kolonomos)** *ažene* : Cast. *ajena* – 'distant', *arikoži* : Cast. *recoge* – 'he collects' // **(Buki)** *ožus* : Cast. *ojos* – 'eyes', *vježe* : Cast. *vieja* – 'old', *kurtižu* : Cast. *cortijo* – 'a yard'
  - △ the preservation of the initial /f/: **(Kolonomos, Buki)** *fazer* : Cast. *hacer* – 'to do', *fīže* : Cast. *hija* – 'a daughter', *favlandu* : Cast. *hablando* – 'saying' // *fazis* : Cast. *haces* – 'you do'
  - △ the preservation of the prepalatal sonor affricate consonant /ǧ/: **(Kolonomos)** *džuzgador* : Cast. *juez* – 'a judge', *dženti* – 'people' // **(Buki)** *đenti* : Cast. *gente* – 'people', *đudijes* : Cast. *judías* – 'Jewish women'
  - △ the preservation of the dental sonor affricate consonant /ʒ/: **(Kolonomos)** *kindzi* : Cast. *quince* – 'fifteen'. No examples were found in Romano's tale
  - △ the labialization of the initial /n/ before /ue/: **(Kolonomos)** *muevu* : Cast. *nuevo* – 'new'. No examples were found in Romano's tale
  - △ *yeísmo* which is the pronunciation of the palatal and sonor consonant lateral /ʎ/ as the palatal, sonore fricative /y/: **(Kolonomos)** *yenu* : Cast. *lleno* – 'full', *yurar* : Cast. *llorar* – 'to cry' // **(Buki)** *ejus* : Cast. *ellos* – 'they', *jivar* : Cast. *llevar* – 'to take'
  - △ the loss of the multiple vibrant /r̄/, the lack of distinction between a simple and multiple /r/: **(Kolonomos)** *peru* : Cast. *perro* – 'a dog' // **(Buki)** *arodeju* : Cast. *arrodeo* – 'I turn', *serades* : Cast. *cerradas* – 'closed'
  - △ the epenthesis of the consonant /r/: **(Kolonomos, Buki)** *dilantri* : Cast.

*delante* – 'in front of'

- △ the metathesis of the consonant /r/: **(Kolonomos, Buki)** *provi* : Cast. *pobre* – 'poor', *pruveza* : Cast. *pobreza* – 'poverty'
- △ the palatalisation of /s/ before /k/: **(Kolonomos, Buki)** *buške* : Cast. *busca* – 'look for', (Kolonomos) *kaške* : Cast. *cáscara* – 'to peel', *moške* : Cast. *mosca* – 'a fly'
- △ the preservation of the archaic initial combination of s+C (while in modern Castilian the initial /e/ appears before the cluster): **(Kolonomos)** *skunder* : Cast. *esconder* – 'to hide', *spiranse* : Cast. *esperanza* – 'hope' // **(Buki)** *stas* : Cast. *Estás* – 'you are', also in personal names of various origins, i.e: *Ster* : *Ester*
- △ the epenthesis of a fricative consonant in the combination /sue/: **(Buki)** a feature occurring consistently: *sfoenju* : Cast. *sueño* – 'a dream' // **(Kolonomos)** a feature occurring inconsistently: *sfwegrus* : Cast. *suegros* – 'parents in law', but on the other hand, *sweñus* : Cast. *sueño* – 'a dream'
- △ the prosthetic /e/ > [i] before the clusters /sue/, /sfue/: **(Kolonomos)** *isfwegru* : Cast. *suegro* – 'a father in law', but the collection also includes forms like *sfwegru*. No examples were found in Romano's tale
- △ the lenition of the consonant /d/ at the end of a word (like in the Castilian pronunciation): **(Kolonomos)** *amistá* : Cast. *amistad* – 'friendship', *varda* : Cast. *verdad* – 'truth', *sivda* : Cast. *ciudad* – 'a city', *vulunta* : Cast. *voluntad* – 'will'. The spelling in Romano's tale does not illustrate the feature
- △ the inconsistent use of the diphthong /ue/ after velar consonants: **(Kolonomos)** *kwalu* : Cast. *cuál* 'which', *kwandu* : Cast. *cuando* – 'when', *gwardadores* : Cast. *guardadores* – 'keepers' // but in Romano's tale /v/ appears after an initial velar consonant: **(Buki)** *kvale*, *kvandu*, *gvardi* : Cast. *guarde*, *gvarte* : Cast. *huerta* – 'an orchard', *kvatru* : Cast. *cuatro* – 'four'

#### Vowels:

- △ the pronunciation of the atonic /o/ as [u]: **(Kolonomos)** *ġatu* : Cast. *gato* – 'a cat', *vulunta* : Cast. *voluntad* – 'will' // **(Buki)** *saljerun* : Cast. *salieron* – 'they left', *Bendiču* : Cast. *bendicho* – 'blessed', also in borrowings: *muabet* : Turk. *moabet* – 'familiar conversation'
- △ the pronunciation of the atonic /e/ as [i]: **(Kolonomos)** *martis* : Cast. *martes* – 'Tuesday', also in borrowings: *tindžire* : Turk. *tencere* – 'a pot' // **(Buki)** *sjempri* : Cast. *siempre* – 'always', *esti* : Cast. *este* – 'this'
- △ the pronunciation of the atonic /a/ as [e]: **(Kolonomos)** *kulpe* : Cast. *culpa* – 'fault', *mwerte* : Cast. *muerta* – 'dead' // **(Buki)** *vizine* : Cast. *vecina* – 'a neighbour', *kaze* : Cast. *casa* – 'home', also in lexical borrowings: *alore* : Ital. *allora* – 'then'
- △ the removal of hiatus with the fricative /y/: **(Kolonomos)** *kriyer* : Cast. *creer* – 'to believe' // **(Buki)** *arodeju* : Cast. *arrodeo* – 'I turn', *veju* : Cast. *veo* – 'I see'
- △ the inconsistent realisation of the diphthongs /ue/, /ua/ as a hiatus in the

combination of vowels /oe/, /oa/: **(Buki)** *poerte* : Cast. *puerta* – 'a door', *boena* : Cast. *buena* – 'good', *koente* : Cast. *cuánta* – 'how many', *moarti* : Cast. *muerte* – 'death' // but in Kolonomos' collection only the realisation of diphthongs: *bwena* : Cast. *buena* 'good', *sweñus* : Cast. *sueño* – 'a dream', *kwalu* : Cast. *cuál* – 'which', *mwerte* : Cast. *muerta* – 'dead'

Laura Minervini writes that the feature is rather peripheral in the Judeo-Spanish language<sup>2</sup>. Muhamed Nezirović and Kalmi Baruh note that it is very rare also in the Bosnian dialect of the language<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, it is confirmed in another Judeo-Spanish text from Bitola found in the document by Rafael Kamhi<sup>4</sup>. That is why it seems quite unusual that the feature is only confirmed in Romano's stylised text, whereas it does not appear in the genuine text from Kolonomos' collection:

- ⤴ on the other hand, there are examples of the reduction of a hiatus between words: **(Kolonomos)** *l'amistá* < *la(e) amistad* : Cast. *la amistad* – 'friendship', *t'arogu* < *ti arogu* : Cast. *te rogo* – 'I beg you' // **(Buki)** *m'invizisi* < *mi invizisi* : Cast. *me envejecí* – 'I got old'
- ⤴ the lack of the diphthong /ue/: **(Kolonomos)** *murido* : Cast. *muerto* – 'dead'. No examples were found in Romano's tale
- ⤴ the lack of the diphthong /ie/: **(Kolonomos, Buki)** *pensu* : Cast. *pienso* – 'I think', *ken* : Cast. *quien* – 'who', *pasensye* : Cast. *paciencia* – 'patience', *keru* : Cast. *quiero* – 'I want'

## 2. Morphology:

- ⤴ the use of past tense forms which are completely different from the Castilian: **(Kolonomos)** *faziras* : Cast. *harás* – 'you will do' // **(Buki)** *ijan* : Cast. *iban* – 'they went'; or with other endings: **(Kolonomos)** *vitis* : Cast. *viste* – 'you saw', *dišitis* : Cast. *dijiste* – 'you said'
- ⤴ the use of different regular forms of participles, whereas in contemporary Castilian irregular forms : **(Kolonomos)** *muridu* : Cast. *muerto* – 'dead'. No examples were found in Romano's tale
- ⤴ the use of the regular ending -š for the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural in various tenses, e.g.: **(Kolonomos, Buki)** *akordaš* : Cast. *recordáis* – 'you remember', *vaš* – 'you go'
- ⤴ the use of the archaic form of the present tense 1<sup>st</sup> person singular : **(Kolonomos, Buki)** *vo* : Cast. *voy* – 'I go/I am going to', *so* : Cast. *soy* – 'I am'
- ⤴ the use of typical Judeo-Spanish diminutive endings: **(Kolonomos)** *kašika* : Cast. *cajita* – 'a little box' // **(Buki)** *fižikus* : Cast. *hijitos* – 'little sons'

2 Laura Minervini, "Formación de lengua sefardí", *Sefardíes: Literatura y lengua de una nación dispersa*, ed. Elena Romero, Cuenca 2008, 37.

3 Muhamed Nezirović, *Jevrejsko-španjolska...*, 576.

4 Aleksandra Twardowska, "Cechy językowe żydowsko-hispańskiego dokumentu Rafaela Kamhiego „Granice Macedonii”, *Południowosłowiańskie Zeszyty Naukowe* 2014, No 11, 52.

- △ in word formation – the use of endings of Romance origin with non-Romance bases: **(Kolonomos)** *sihiludu* 'intelligent' < *sihel* – 'intelligence' < Hebr. *sekhel*, *hinoze* – 'graceful' < Hebr. *khen* – 'grace' // *hazinura* – 'sickness' < *hazin* < Arab. 'azin – 'sick'

### 3. Lexis:

- △ the use of Judeo-Spanish vocabulary of various origins that does not exist in the contemporary Castilian standard or in forms and with meanings distinct from the Spanish: *skapandu* < *skapar* : Cast. *terminar* – 'to finish', *agora* : Cast. *ahora* – 'now', *topar* : Cast. *encontrar* – 'to find', *onde* : Cast. *donde* – 'where', // *burako* : Cast. *agujero* – 'a hole', *kazal* : Cast. *pueblo* – 'a village', *mansives* : Cast. *juventud* – 'youth', *negru* – 'bad' : Cast. *negro* – 'black'

Words like *agora* or *burako* exist in contemporary Portugal, but Muhamed Nezirović<sup>5</sup>, like Haim Vidal Sephiha, does not treat them as borrowings. Considering that the Judeo-Spanish vocabulary is the closest to fifteenth-century Spanish vocabulary, one has to remember that in that period all the Roman languages of the Iberian Peninsula were at the beginning of their development and were closer to each other so their vocabulary could be common.

Nevertheless, there are other words in both texts that should be treated as lexical borrowings of various origins, e.g.:

- △ Turkish – *šučur* < *šükür* – 'thank God', *mašala* < *mašallah* – 'praise be!; how wonderful', *tenekeđi* < *tenekeği* – 'a tinsmith', *đami* : Turk. *cami* – 'a mosque', *karpuz* < *karpuz* – 'a watermelon', *čorba* < *çorba* – 'soup', *kapak* < *kapak* – 'a pot', *tindžire* < *tencere* – 'a pot', *uda* < *oda* – 'a room'
- △ Hebrew – *muet* < *moed* – 'a holiday', *kal* < *kehila* – 'a synagogue', *birahas* < *berakha* – 'blessing', *minjanis* < *minyán*, // *hamor* < *khamor* – 'a donkey', *mabul* < *mabul* – 'flood', *sihiludu* – 'intelligent' < *sekhel* – 'intelligence', *mazal* < *mazal* – 'luck', *hinoze* – 'graceful' < *khen* – 'grace'
- △ Arabic – *evlad* – 'children', *hazinura* < 'azin – 'sick'
- △ Italian – *alore* < *allora* – 'then', *zvelte* < *svelta* – 'brisk'
- △ French – *mersi* < *merci* – 'thank you'

### 4. Syntax

- △ The use of personal and impersonal obligational construction without a relative pronoun: **(Buki)** *tengu dizir* : Cast. *tengo que decir* – 'I have to say', *ay morir* : Cast. *hay que morir* – 'one must die'. No examples were found in Kolonomos' collection
- △ future constructions built inconsistently, more often without the preposition *a*: **(Buki)** *vo jir* : Cast. *voy a ir* – 'I am going to go', *vaš jivar* : Cast. *vaís a llevar* – 'you are going to take' // **(Kolonomos)** *va fazer* : Cast. *va a hacer*, *vo*

<sup>5</sup> Muhamed Nezirović, *Jevrejsko-španjolska...*, 47-48.

*murir* : Cast. *voy a murir*.; *vas a ser*. This kind of constructions is also used in subordinate time clauses, unlike in modern Spanish: **(Kolonomos)** *Kome va fazer la vide (...) kwandu yo mi vo murir*.; *apuntarun il diye, kwandu va ser la bode*

- ^ the use of subjunctive – **(Kolonomos)** *ki ti salge l'alma* – 'may your soul leave', *si kiriya ki la dišyeres* – 'you should have said' // **(Buki)** *ki mi bivan* – 'long live', *il Dio ki ti gvardi* – 'may God watch over you', *bjen ki vus seja* – 'I wish you happiness'

This introductory analysis shows that Žamila Kolonomos' oral collection is a very interesting sample of the vernacular Judeo-Spanish language and has many features typical of the Monastir (Bitola) dialect, such as archaic lexis and archaic phonological features (e.g. the preservation of the sounds /š/, /ž/, /ĝ/, the archaic verbal forms *vo*, *so*). On the other hand, it includes many Judeo-Spanish innovations like the metathesis on consonants, the realisation of atonic vowels, Judeo-Spanish verbal forms, etc. Almost all the same linguistic features appear also in Romano's Monastirli-like tale. The features from the paper are also confirmed in the classic studies of the Judeo-Spanish language and its Monastir dialect, like the work by Max Aaron Luria<sup>6</sup>. Both texts can be useful contributions to these studies of the Judeo-Spanish dialect.

#### **Symbols and Abbreviations:**

Arab. - Arabic  
 Cast. – Castilian  
 Ital. – Italian  
 Hebr. – Hebrew  
 Turk. – Turkish

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<sup>6</sup> Max Aaron Luria, *A Study of the Monastir Dialect of Judeo-Spanish*, New York, Paris 1930.