

LANGUAGE CHOICE OF SEPHARDIM IN BELGRADE IN THE MODERN TIME

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Abstract

The topic of this article is the language choice of the Sephardim in Belgrade in the age of modernization (from the end of the 19th century to the 1940s). The analysis done in this paper shows that the interest for study and language use together with the concept of mother/national/foreign languages are conditioned by the ideological and cultural reasons of the time. When it comes to foreign language choice, it can be noted that, in some cases, decisions reflected the tendencies among some ethnic groups, while in other cases, the decisions were specific for Sephardim. The goal of this article is to gain deeper insight into language use and the relations between languages among the Sephardim in Belgrade, as well as to contribute to a better understanding of the impact of modernization on Belgrade citizens in general.

Key words: language choice, modernization, Sephardim in Serbia, mother/national/foreign languages, foreign language teaching in the past

Introduction

Subjects and aims of the study

What is at the core of this study is the language choice of the Sephardim in Belgrade in the age of rapid modernization from the second half of the 19th century to World War Two. In the article, both ideological and cultural reasons are analysed, which during a period of radical changes, conditioned the language choice of mother/national/foreign languages (or more) within the self-reflective and Sephardic quest for their identity, as E. Benbassa and A. Rodrigue have described in the following manner:

“Sephardi will have to face the big challenges of contemporary Jewish history such as identity, community, group loyalty and relationship to country.

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They will also have to answer a more general question: how to be a Jew, especially a Sephardic Jew, in the modern world?”²

Although the focus of this paper is on the impact of modernization regarding the language plan, data on language choice among Sephardim will be analysed throughout time, taking into account the very language choice in the Oriental period. Thus this will enable a more comprehensive analysis of the subject in question. Research questions are two-fold, based on the corpus data gathered from various authentic materials, a survey *My family* (The Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade, 1979-1980) and numerous secondary sources respectively. The first question is to find out the languages that Sephardim in Belgrade used in their mutual communication by means of both qualitative and critical sociolinguistic analyses. The second question is to find out to what extent Sephardim participated in the multilingualism nourished in Belgrade for centuries, firstly in the Oriental period, then in multilingual Belgrade, and, finally, in the age of rapid modernization of this city as the Serbian capital.

To give answers to the above-mentioned questions, it will be necessary to find out data on the tendencies of language choice among Sephardim. Special attention will be given to the language used or studied in the field of education. Moreover, data on the foreign languages known by the Sephardim at various times will be analysed by both qualitative and quantitative methods. This data will be compared with data acquired from the study about foreign language choice in the broader Serbian context. The studies are mainly about the history of modern foreign language teaching (French, German, Russian and English) in Serbia.

The primary goal is to create a more comprehensive picture about language use and attitudes towards languages among Sephardim in Belgrade as a reflection of more general social and identification phenomena. Apart from that, this paper aims to contribute to a better fluency in foreign language teaching and the influences of modernization on Belgrade citizens, especially on Sephardic ones.

Primary sources

The corpus consists of various Sephardic historical documentation, printed or handwritten. The first group of documentation includes texts published in the Sephardic publishing house from 19th c. to the Second World War and two books comprised of Sephardic correspondence. Handwritten texts include both official documentation from the 19th c. and a survey entitled *My family*, which conducted

² “(...) los sefardíes tendrán que hacer frente a los grandes desafíos de la historia contemporánea de los judíos: identidad, comunidad, lealtad al grupo y relación con el Estado. También tendrán que responder a un interrogante más general: ¿cómo ser judío, y, concretamente, judío sefardí, en el mundo moderno?” (Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2004: 20)

among members of various Jewish communities in ex-Yugoslavia between 1979 and 1980. Those of Sephardim descent from Belgrade filled in the surveys used for language choice, and a description of material will be provided in the rest of the paper.

There are 23 questionnaires that Sephardic people, born between 1890 and 1942, filled in. In addition, there are data on informants' parents and grandparents and two questionnaires distributed in 2004. In this paper, answers will be analysed in terms of language fluency and use by informants and their above-mentioned ancestors. The study includes 68 subjects (37 women and 31 men).

My family serves as valuable sociolinguistic testimony about various aspects of Jewish life from the second half of the 19th c. to 1980s. Even though the survey is not meant to be used for linguistic research as a source, it is obvious that the authors³ were keenly aware of the importance of language for creating a general picture about past family and social Jewish life. These are the questions regarding languages:

“The first part: My family today

12 current languages used at home

13 languages spoken at the parents' house

The third part: My general education – vocational education

4. I speak – use languages

The ninth part: My parents

6. They spoke one language or more

7. Literacy

The tenth part: My grandparents

Please write down everything you remember about them. To give answers, the same questions refer to parents, too/the ninth part, questions 1–15.” (The Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade, 1979-1980)

In spite of the fact that the survey was not conducted by sociolinguistic experts, it stands as a unique document because of the authenticity of its contents and the time period that the survey took place. However, there are some limitations regarding the usage of the survey. Sometimes it fails to provide the same number of data for both sexes, including information about how language choice and fluency

³ Thanks to the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade the authors have found out that the survey *My family* was a result of the work of Jewish women to preserve Jewish tradition. They gathered on the 18th November 1979 at the meeting of Coordinating board of Jewish Women's sessions. Activists such as Luci Petrovic-Mevorah, Eta Neifeld, Lea Sorger, Tina Finci, Nina Glisic, Vilma Market, Bonka Davico, Magda Fenje-Micic, Magda Berger, Jela Hidvegi and others came up with a survey and organized data collection. The task of Women's sessions in the different Jewish municipalities in ex-Yugoslavia was to hand out surveys to everyone interested in cooperation. The distributed material was classified according to the informants' residence in the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade.

changed in the course of an individual's life (which is of the utmost importance for studying language maintenance/replacement).

Data on the Belgrade Sephardim born between 1840 and 1942 are classified in three generation groups considering two critical moments in 1880 and 1990. The former refers to the time after the Sephardim started to integrate more into Serbian society and education, whereas the latter refers to the end of World War One when significant historical changes were initiated.

Results for each group are displayed in tables (see *Tables 1–6*). The first three tables show the degree of monolingualism (to Judeo-Spanish or Serbian) and bilingualism (to Judeo-Spanish and Serbian) in the intercommunication among Sephardim, while the rest of the tables show the presence of foreign languages in the linguistic repertoire of subjects. Given that the sample is limited in terms of both number and representativeness, it is not possible to reach solid conclusions, but there is a fair level of certainty about tendencies in language choice of the Sephardic community in the times of rapid modernization.

What does language choice reveal?

Linguists and sociolinguists often highlight that language choice in the multilingual context represents a factor of crucial importance⁴. Nevertheless, there is no definition of this notion. A great number of authors point out that language choice is an integral and essential part of language behaviour and is mainly in accordance with its norms that are mutually accepted among speakers (Fase et al, 1992: 7; Pic, 1997: ix; F. Gimeno Menendez; M. V. Gimeno Menendez, 2003: 81)

Regarding the language maintenance/replacement⁵ of minority languages, Fase et al (1992: 6-7) claim that language choice in communication within the group has a decisive influence on the outcomes of these processes and therefore, they consider that it is vital to analyse changes deeply in terms of language choice in the internal communication between the group members. Hyltenstam and Stroud (1996: 572) feel that the language the individual is going to use depends on his/her personal characteristics and the context of communication. As a result, obvious regularities can be found in the changing patterns of language use, which are typical of language replacement.

⁴ In the sense, Fasold (1984: 180, cited from: Pic 1997: ix) notes that sociolinguistics would never have existed if it had not been for the speakers who could choose a language.

⁵ Hyltenstam and Stroud (1996: 572) offer a definition on language maintenance/replacement based on language choice: "Language shift is seen as a process where categorical use of the minority language develops into a phase of alternate use of the two languages which in turn develops into categorical use of the majority language."

Starting from the basic postulates of sociolinguistics, Filipovic insists that there be a crucial link between language choice and the system of social and linguistic communities, which especially come into play in social interactions:

“I consider that the structure of our social and speaking communities, which directly and indirectly influences on the position of each individual in the social hierarchy based on power, segregation and hegemony respectively, is closely and crucially connected with the language choice we make every time when we are emerged into social interaction.”⁶ (Filipović, 2015: 1)

On the other hand, Pütz (1997: ix) sees the same correlation in the light of cognitive linguistics, concluding that speakers have different languages at their disposal “when they sort and structure, that is ‘interpret’ their own social-cultural experience of the world”.⁷ As Filipovic explains, the manner in which individuals, consciously and subconsciously, choose a particular language provides an insight into much more than mere information about language: language choice can give us information about the character of a speaker and his/her identities (Filipović, 2015: 2).

In the rest of the paper, what is outlined are the language choices which Sephardim made in different periods, especially in the age of modernization and in the field of education. The aim of the paper is to show that language choice for communication in and between communities directly depends on the historical circumstances and on-going political-social ideologies, which result in particular language ideologies, which can be clearly seen in the new interpretation of the notion of mother/national/foreign language that the new age brought to the Sephardi in Belgrade.

Language choice of the Sephardi in Belgrade through time

Belgrade Sephardic life and their language choices in the Oriental period

In the Oriental period (1521-1867), the Sephardi in Belgrade led a patriarchal, pious and traditional lifestyle, as did coregionalists in other parts in the Ottoman Empire and their citizens that belong to various ethnic and religious groups (such as Turks, Serbians, Romani, Greeks, Wallachian, Tzintzars, and Armenians).⁸

⁶ "I argue that the structure of our social and speech communities, which directly and indirectly impact each individual's positioning on a social hierarchy based on power, segregation and hegemony, stands in close and intrinsic correlation with language choices we make every time we engage in social interaction."

⁷ "(...) we may assume that speakers have linguistic alternatives available to them when organizing and structuring, i. e. ‘construing’ their social and cultural experiences in the world."

⁸ The review is based on the data from: Vučina Simović (2009; 2010; 2013), Vučina Simović i Filipović (2009) i Filipović; Vučina Simović (2012). For more information please consult the bibliography of given works.

For centuries, the Sephardi lived in a special city quarter frequently called Jewish mahala or Jali (from the Turkish word *jaly* meaning "riverbank" because it is situated on the bank of the Danube River) in modest, mainly ground floor terraced houses mutually connected with yards or overlooking a mutual yard (*curtijo* in Judeo-Spanish). Their customs and habits in terms of diet, dressing, behaviour and others were completely adjusted to the Oriental surroundings. There was a patriarchal system in the family and society and the subordination of everyday life and intellectual work to religion. Generally speaking, their life was really modest; many lived in poverty because they occupied modest professions and had large families.

The Jewish municipality was responsible for education of the Balkan Sephardi in the whole Oriental period and municipal leaders were hand-picked among the richest and most respectful men. The municipality possessed its own school that exclusively boys could attend and that gave its schoolchildren only basic knowledge about religious literature and grammar of the Hebrew language. Only a small number of students continued schooling in higher religious schools.

In contrast to boys, the Sephardic girls did not receive formal schooling until the second half of the 19th century. Despite being illiterate, women knew prayers, religious laws and regulations. Mother taught their daughters how to run a house, but also different forms of oral literature and national traditions.

During the time of the Ottoman Empire, the sociolinguistic situation of the Sephardic communities was the same in the whole Orient. Especially the most educated men⁹ that belonged to the religious elite spoke the main languages of Judeo-Spanish and Hebrew (diglosia). The former lower variety was used for day-to-day life, whereas the latter, prestigious Hebrew (together with Aramaic) was used as the language of Jewish religion and culture. As Hebrew was regarded as a "true" Jewish language, Judeo-Spanish was not studied as a school subject in spite of being spoken and used as the language of teaching in traditional Jewish schools.

A patriarchal and conservative lifestyle did not allow women direct access to education or to intra- and inter-ethnic public life, so only Sephardic culture and monolingualism in Judeo-Spanish was available to them. They were the pillars of preserving and passing down ethnic language, traditional values, oral literature and customs (Vučina Simović, 2009: 96-98; Filipović; Vučina Simović, 2010).

As in the case of Hebrew, foreign language learning among the Sephardim was the privilege of men who were frequently in contact with other ethnic and

⁹ Due to religious reasons, every Sephardic man had to know to read Hebrew. Although many of them possessed basic knowledge of the language, the influence of Hebrew on written and spoken Judeo-Spanish was overwhelming not only among rabbis but also among common people (Baruh, 1923: 20-25).

religious groups.¹⁰ However, foreign languages were not studied in Jewish schools, but were learned through direct communication with neighbouring groups, because the competence of these groups varied significantly¹¹.

For the Sephardi in the Balkans, language fluency was an important precondition for business, mostly used in trade. Apart from the Turkish, Sephardic men usually spoke Italian and Greek as the most significant languages of trade. Despite scarce historical sources, it can be assumed that Sephardim knew Serbian, Tzintzar, Armenian and other languages to some extent. With the political and cultural upturn of the Slavic people in the 19th and 20th centuries, Belgrade Sephardi started to learn and use Slavic languages, among them Serbian (Vučina Simović, 2013: 182).

As could be expected, the most prominent and prestigious foreign language among the Sephardim was Turkish, since it was the language of the Ottoman Empire, which exerted its influence over other languages in the Empire. However, at that time, Turkish was not the *lingua franca* in the communication between different groups. A sociolinguistic situation is depicted as stable multilingualism where some languages are regarded as prestigious and widely used at places between people of different descent (Vučina Simović, 2013: 181): for instance, downtown (Turkish *çarşı*), social economic city centre, and numerous inns (Turkish *hans*) in the vicinity.

Historical data reveal that external multilingualism was highly appreciated among different groups living in the Balkans under the rule of Turks, in contrast to internal multilingualism and the replacement of one language by another (Turkish or languages of different millets). The reason is that ethnic language is intuitively experienced¹² as a crucial part of group identity, contributing to social-ethnic border towards "others" (Vučina Simović, 2010: 259-262; 2013: 177). For this reason, Judeo-Spanish managed to maintain itself as the only language of communication in the Sephardi family and community in Belgrade until the second half of 19th century.

¹⁰ They were usually traders, craftsmen and Jewish community officials for public issues and relations with other ethnic and religious groups.

¹¹ It should be noted that, in the past, multilingual communication was mainly present at work and it did not require a high degree of language competence. Widely spread multilingualism in Europe was the result of the fact that language fluency was "preconditioned for performing many tasks in everyday life. " ("a necessary precondition for mastering the various tasks in everyday life") (Braunmüller & Ferraresi, 2003: 3).

¹² The names such as *djudio/djidio* and *djudezmo/judezmo* for ethnic Sephardic language testify about experiencing language as their own before modernization.

What is modernity and how did it effect languages? The case of Sephardim in the Orient

Originating from Western Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, modernity denotes the new model of civilization based on a rational view of the world which spread across the whole world (Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2004: 175; Filipović, 2015: 9). Its biggest "producers and suppliers" were social and intellectual elites (Gellner, 1964, cited from: Smith, 1998: 27). The basic ideas of modernity (accentuating those about progress, enlightenment, objectivism, empiricism, and the like) shook the traditional lifestyle and established a new social order together with new goals and needs (Bauman & Briggs, 2003: 17; Filipović, 2015: 11).

It should be noted that modernity is a very complex phenomenon, because it is about a dynamic and progressive process of social, political and economic character, whereas it is an ideological movement (called the age of good reasoning) that influenced the mindset and changed the way that people had experienced, understood and reconstructed reality.

Modern ideas spread and developed closely together with nationalist ideas, which emerged in French and German philosophies at the end of 18th century. Both types of ideas spread all over the world, but with a different pace at different times, which directly depended on the nature of relations between new elites and western countries (Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2004: 175-176).

Modern and nationalist ideas changed crucially the perception of language concept as well as of concrete languages. Moreover, when national countries were established based on their own ethnic cultures, declared as nationalist, language became one of the new pivots and symbols generating ethnicity and ethnic/national identities (Gellner, 1964, cited from: Smith, 1998: 27). The new ideology was born that was frequently called "national state ideology" or "national/standard language ideology". Based on this ideology, after a particular nation would proclaim their language, the language would gain a modern standardized shape and became an integral part of the ethnic and national identity of its country and its citizens. The use of majority language was directly linked with social-economic progress, in contrast to minority language groups being connected with "foreign and different" and "old-fashioned" (Kalavey, 2008: 19), something for which there was no room for in modern society. The idea "one country – one people – one language" illustrates that (individual and social) multilingualism in the European setting used to be a rule not an exception (Braunmüller & Ferraresi, 2003: 1). This article explains how accepting national/standard language ideologies affected the replacement of Judeo-Spanish.

When it comes to modernisation in the Oriental-Sephardic context, Benbassa and Rodrigue (2004: 19, 176-177) believe that it was a polyvalent process that encompassed several parallel movements which every Sephardic community interpreted differently due to historical reasons and conditions for westernization. These accounts are confirmed by our own research, which points to a clear continuum between the Sephardic communities in ex-Yugoslavia in terms of dynamics and the level of acquiring modern ideas and subsequent replacement of the Sephardic ethnic language. At one end, there is a progressive Belgrade community, and, at the opposite end, the most traditional and conservative Bitola community, whereas communities in Sarajevo and Skopje are somewhere in between, except that the Sarajevo community modernized faster than the one in Skopje (Vučina Simović, 2010).

The spread of ideas among the Sephardi depended on, as in other cases, the wish of their elite to modernize under the impact of propaganda that “western missionaries” distributed and the picture they had about majority group elite and the Jewish in the West. Modern ideas, which covered a given language ideology, were passed down to the lower Sephardic social classes by higher ones. In the following example, Spanish senator Angel Pulido transfers the frequent metaphor about modernization and progress as light to language plan. As an “apostle of Sephardic goals” in Spain and a great supporter of recastilianization of Judeo-Spanish, he advocated the Sephardic elite language:

“In this difference we adhere to the language of people above, not only because it is the right one, but because it represents a light which goes ahead, showing the road which the expression has to follow; with that height descends into newspaper, books, prayers, poems, theatre...and there the people take it and adjust to it.” (Pulido, 1905: 64)¹³

In the letter addressed to Pulido, Moses Abravanel from Salonika elaborates on language choice among the Sephardi that directly depended on the social status of a speaker. The higher social class insisted on the use of French and Italian languages, the middle one looked up to the higher, and the lower one kept Judeo-Spanish language.

“Aristocracy members very rarely speak Castilian; they accept French and Italian; but among middle class members and common people speak Judeo-Spanish, and some middle class families use French. I do not believe that this beautiful language will be wasted just like that, given the number of Jews in our city who

¹³ “Pero en esta diferencia nos atenemos al lenguaje de los de arriba; no solamente porque es el verdadero, sino porque él representa la luz que marcha por delante, la que va señalando el derrotero que ha de seguir la expresión; desde esa altura descendiendo al periódico, al libro, al sermón, al canto, al teatro... y allí lo recoge el pueblo y se lo asimila.”

speak and use it. Due to assimilation with other peoples, the Spanish language comes secondary, which could lose a lot of its significance when the other government was in charge of our province.”¹⁴ (Pulido, 1905: 440-443)

Modernization of Belgrade Sephardic: social and linguistic consequences

Serbian society entered the era of quite a fast modernization, led by social elite eager to become modern and European. Soon all the Belgrade citizens underwent deep ideological, social, political and linguistic changes. The Sephardic community, as other minority groups in Belgrade, had to adjust to the lifestyle of cultural-linguistic surroundings created by the elite so that the elite themselves could advance. Adjustment went faster among the young and the rich, denoting a range of changes, which will be presented further on. In due course, the cultural-linguistic assimilation of Sephardi into Serbian society was more prominent. Despite greater acculturation, the Sephardi managed to preserve their ethnic and religious identity, and to a less extent their language, until the Second World War.¹⁵

Modernization brought important changes to the Sephardic lifestyle: more and more people were leaving the Jewish quarter and chose modern professions. As a result, they accepted new, European habits and customs (*a la franca/franga*) progressively in terms of their way of dressing, behaviour, work, etc. Sephardi created new political and social relations; the strict patriarchal order got weaker and individualism strengthened. These changes were accompanied by waning interest for religion, oral tradition and local customs. From the last decade of the 19th century, more and more Jews were leaving the Jewish quarter Jaliya, except for those who were the eldest, poorest and most conservative (Vučina Simović, 2010: 125-130). By the mid 19th century, Belgrade Sephardi become more interested in modern education. Attracted by modern life, they realized that traditional education could offer neither them nor their children the necessary knowledge to progress in society. Increasing discontent made the Sephardic elite act. In 1847, the Jewish municipality established a school fund for education improvement. The official founding documents of the fund reveal the great ambitions and expectations of

¹⁴ “Entre la alta aristocracia non se habla el castellano que muy poco; adoptan el frances o el Italiano; ma entre la mediana y la ordinaria es el Judeo-Español que domina, y en algunas familias de la clase madiana tambien se empesa hoy a emplear el frances, creo que non se piedre en tan poco esta lengua linda, siendo hoy todo el número de judios de nuestra ciudad que la hablan y emplean. La asimilacion a otros pueblos hace dar una emportancia segundaria al Español, que puede piadrer mucho de su valor si otro gobierno ocuparia nuestra provincia.”

¹⁵ Establishing borders between new countries weakened contacts between the Sephardic communities, but it did not destroy them. Thus a common cultural Sephardic zone managed to maintain itself flourishing in the Oriental period, in spite of progressive decadency, until World War Two (Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2004: 19, 174-175).

signers in terms of improvement of the work conditions and teaching efficiency in the Jewish school in Belgrade. Teaching Serbian, Greek and Hebrew languages were supposed to be introduced (Historical Archives of Belgrade, 1847; Archives of Serbia, 1847). However, notwithstanding the progress achieved and the introduction of both Serbian and German lessons in the highest class, changes were not sufficient in the seventh class (Sindik s.a.: 102). The Jewish school could not keep pace with time and track the development of public education.

Seeing that they fail to implement the desired reforms themselves, at the beginning of the 19th century, the Sephardi decided to turn to authorities and requested that their school become part of the public education system. Upon receiving approval, the era of Sephardic education in the majority language started. In 1864, Serbian teachers started to educate Sephardic children in the reformed Jewish school in Jala, where the public school for girls was opened for girls with varied ethnic backgrounds, with the majority of them being Jewish schoolgirls (Vučina Simović, 2010: 139-140).

At first, these reforms created obstacles in terms of the communication language between teachers and students. In the beginning of the 1870s, the Ministry of Education received many complaints from teachers and Sephardic representatives due to insufficient knowledge of the classroom language among Sephardic schoolchildren. As students themselves felt the need to improve their knowledge of Serbian, a group of Sephardic youth from Jala founded the *Public School for Education for Serbian-Jewish Youth* in 1872 (Archives of Serbia, 1873). As David Alkalaj said, the Serbian language and grammar were taught at this school, and even illiterate Serbians and members of other ethnic groups could attend it. Among ethnic groups, Greeks and Tzintzars wanted to improve their poor knowledge of Serbian language (Alkalaj, 1939: 5).

Several years later, the language problem was solved thanks to improvement in the knowledge of the Serbian language; therefore, in most cases, a great number of Sephardi could continue their schooling in high school and then in Lyceum (that was converted into the university in 1905) (Kalderon, 1939; Rakić, 1992: 337). The Sephardi completely integrated into the Serbian educational system, after adapting progressively, showing interest in and expressing demand for language learning, especially Serbian and the popular world languages of the time. These events reached a climax when the Sephardic ethnic language was replaced by Serbian in the field of education. Apropos of the formal teaching of foreign languages, at the end of the day, Sephardic students learned the same languages as the students of other ethnicities with whom they shared desks on a daily basis.

a) The replacement of Judeo-Spanish language

At the end of 19th century, foreign language proficiency did not impact on the choice of language as communication within the Sephardic community. One of the articles of Samuel Elias, the editor of magazine *El amigo del pueblo*, testified that the Sephardi in the Orient learned the language of the country where they lived in order to communicate with their neighbours about work and other things. Elias claims that it did not affect the use of Judeo-Spanish, “which became, at some point, their mother tongue and national language”.¹⁶ However, the year previous, the same author highlighted that Belgrade Sephardi had already replaced their language substantially with Serbian in the newspaper *Luzero de la Paciencia* published in Turnu-Severin:

“Our brothers and sisters from Serbia (...) tend to adopt habits and customs of their fellow-countrymen Serbians who they get on well with and use more language of the country than their own language. – On concerts, at balls, and in conversation the Jewish use Serbian; also at home many of them speak only the language of the country.”¹⁷

At first glance Elias claims seem contradictory, but they really testify about changes in the language choice among members of the Sephardic community in Belgrade. These changes happened much earlier than the ones in other Sephardic communities in the Orient. In the time of modernization, the early adaptation to the social, cultural and economic climate in Serbia enabled the Sephardic community, especially its own young social-economic elite, to open up to the majority society, which accepted new ideas and customs quickly. Among the youth who stood out in clear relief, were the Sephardic women that became agents of its replacement, after a period in which they were the pillars of the preservation of ethnic language and culture. Seeing that they were a double minority, being both women and Jewish, they opted for the majority language in order to advance (Filipović; Vučina Simović, 2010). Meanwhile, older generations and/or lower class members of Sephardic society were the agents of maintaining traditional Sephardic culture and Judeo-Spanish.

Data from Table 1 show that informants of the *My family* poll born between 1840 and 1879 (24 in total) were mostly bilingual (79%), more men than women (85% versus 73%) and one informant spoke only Serbian. As expected, among

¹⁶ “ke se izo, en alguna suerte, komo lengua materna i nasionala” (Elias, 1889: 1, transcribed by I.V.S).

¹⁷ “Nuestros hermanos de Serbia (...) se esfuerzan de adoptar los usos y costumbres de sus compatriotas Serbos, viven en buenas relaciones con ellos, practican mas mucho la lengua del pais que sus propia idioma. – En los conciertos, en los bales, en sus conversaciones los Judios emplean el Serbo; mesmo en sus casas, muchos de ellos hablan solo la lengua del país.” (Elias, 1888: 83-84)

women there were more monolinguals of Judeo-Spanish (27%) than bilinguals in comparison with men (8%) because in that period they were still housebound.

Table 1: languages in the internal communication among Sephardi born between 1840 and 1879

		24	Women	11	Men	13
Languages	total	%		%		%
Serbian/Serbian-Croatian and Ladino/Spanish	19	79	8	73	11	85
Only Ladino/Spanish	4	17	3	27	1	8
Only Serbian/Serbian-Croatian	1	4	0	0	1	8

In *Table 2*, which refers to language use in the internal communication among subjects born between 1880 and 1917 (34 in total) it can be noted that the bilingual level retain the average value (79%), but now bilingualism is more common to women (84%) in contrast to men (73%). Monolingualism in Serbian among men increased from 8% in the first group to 27% in the second, whereas this phenomenon appeared among women in the second group (16%). According to these facts, it can be concluded that language replacement unfolded faster among Sephardic men than among their female counterparts.

Table 2: Languages in the internal communication among Sephardi born between 1880 and 1917

		34	women	19	men	15
Languages	total	%		%		%
Serbian/Serbian-Croatian and Ladino/Spanish	27	79	16	84	11	73
Only Ladino/Spanish	0	0	0	0	0	0
Only Serbian/Serbian-Croatian	7	21	3	16	4	27

Despite their paucity, data on subjects born between 1918 and 1942, displayed in *Table 3*, show that in this generation bilingualism in both Judeo-Spanish and Serbian dropped by 50% prior to the Second World War, whereas

monolingualism in Serbian increased by 21% in comparison to the previous generation. With regard to sex, there is a profound difference in the distribution of results. Firstly, it can be concluded that 67% of bilingual men tended to preserve Judeo-Spanish, while 43% of women were bilingual. Secondly, 57% women are accustomed to speaking only in Serbian in contrast to 33% of the men. This datum confirms the earlier conclusions in terms of the role of women in the last phase of language replacement. Results of the poll show that all of the informants used to speak Judeo-Spanish until the Second World War, but after the war, they all started to use only Serbian.

Table 3: Languages in the internal communication among Sephardi born between 1918 and 1942

		10	Women	7	Men	3
Languages	total	%		%		%
Serbian/Serbian-Croatian and Ladino/Spanish	5	50	3	43	2	67
Only Ladino/Spanish	0	0	0	0	0	0
Only Serbian/Serbian-Croatian	5	50	4	57	1	33

b) Why was Judeo-Spanish being replaced?

In contrast with modernization dynamics that differed from society to society, the new regimes established in the 19th and 20th centuries in the Orient, the Osman language in the time of reforms (*Tanzimat*) and the regimes in the national Balkan countries exercised the decision to adopt a “unitarian, monolithic and monocultural dimension of a western national country”¹⁸ in a very unanimous fashion. For this reason, the young Serbian country, semi-independent of the Osman authorities, as well as all the other nation states, advocated monolingualism in the national language and created a climate in which the national language was “the key to education, employment and participation in the political life” (Đurić, 2013: 404).

At that time, the Sephardi connected Judeo-Spanish with an “old-fashioned” and “backward” life in the patriarchal and pious Jewish quarter, while the Serbians led a contemporary and progressive lifestyle. Sephardi deeply believed that both fluency and proficiency in Serbian would bring them greater social-economic mobility in the majority society.

¹⁸“(…) la dimensión unitaria, monolítica y monocultural del Estado-nación occidental” (Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2004: 237).

A new feeling of belonging to the national country and her people was developed quickly, which impugned the status of Judeo-Spanish as a language and its symbolic value as ethnic and national language. In 1894 the debate about mother tongue took place in the magazine *El amigo del pueblo* revealing attitudes of young Belgrade intellectuals about both Judeo-Spanish and Serbian languages:

“(...) what should be taken as mother tongue is the language of a country which accepted us with open arms in the time of our misery, which gave us of all rights that our every countryman enjoyed. The motto of our young intelligentsia is accepting Serbian as the mother tongue. Such a motto can have as a consequence the moving away from the Spanish, maybe even completely, at least as a mother tongue. For us, the Spanish language is a foreign language and there is not much to understand that each of us should first learn the language of his/her own country and then foreign languages”.¹⁹

At the end of 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries, Sephardi who were the agents of modernization in their communities, were attracted to two social-political ideologies which they attempted to spread among their brothers and sisters with less or more enthusiasm. Both ideologies had a language programme i.e. they promoted the use of one national language such as Modern Spanish or Modern Hebrew. The former was accounted by Sephardi in the modern era, whereas the latter national Jewish language was modernized and revitalized thanks to the ideology of Jewish nationalism – Zionism. However, it turned out that people against the national Serbian language were hardly interesting to the Sephardi. What they were interested in was the language of the country in which they lived. French, German, Russian, English and Italian were considered to be prestigious languages because they were significant international languages in the fields of culture, politics and economy. These languages were studied by Sephardi intellectuals on account of modern education and culture, but the intellectuals did not intend to acquire the aforementioned languages as a national language, despite their wide diffusion (Vučina Simović, 2010).

Contrary to Judeo-Spanish, all the above-mentioned prestigious languages had a standardized form owing to their status of national languages. This had a strong impact on the language awareness in Sephardi. Namely, they started to think that their language was inferior to other languages, since their language lacked

¹⁹“(…) ke komo lengua materna prime tomar la lengua de la tyera ke mos resivyo kon manos avyertas en el tyempo de muestra dezgrasya la kual a mos dyo i mos da los frutos de todas las derechidades ke goza kada uno de nuestros konermanos. la deviza de la manseveria inteligente muestra es de aresivir por lengua materna la lengua serba i puede tener komo resultado de alešar la avla espanyola si no por entero alomenos komo lengua materna. para mozotros la lengua espanyola es una lengua ažena i kon poko sensya se puede pensar ke kada uno emprimero kale ke sepa la lengua de su tyera i enos en segundo lugar lenguas aženas”. (R. P. 1.3.1894, 200-202; transcribed by Ana Štulić)

mutual norms and was nowhere near gaining the status of national language. Sephardi actually embraced generally and accepted the ideology of modernity, which was an integral part of ideological arsenal of nationalism in terms of “language ideology of a national country” or “the ideology of standard/national languages”. To be modern and necessary, the Judeo-Spanish language should be national and standardized, being a spoken language and without familiarity with Judaism. Seeing that the language in question originated from Iberian Peninsula, it was regarded as inferior to Hebrew. Lacking a contemporary grammar, dictionary and orthography, Judeo-Spanish acquired “jargon” status without its significance and future. As a member of *Esperansa*, the organization of the Sephardi students in Vienna, Isidor Sumbul expressed negative attitudes towards Judeo-Spanish:

“Without grammar, dictionary, its own letters, the language is left to irresponsible arbitrariness and so ruined as much as the number of countries where Spanish Jewish live”.²⁰

The same author considered that the ethnic Sephardic language was nothing but “broken Spanish” (“un mal español”) and that because of numerous mistakes and provincialisms it disabled the Sephardi to communicate with their brothers and sisters from other parts of Serbia, Bulgaria and Germany and that “a real Spaniard cannot understand it” (“ke un vero espanyol no la puede entender”, R. P, 1/3/1894: 200-202, transcribed by A. Š.).

Owing to the language ideologies in question, at the end of the 19th century the Sephardi let the majority language enter the domains reserved for Judeo-Spanish for a long time (family domain, oral tradition, religion, written works, Jewish quarter, Jewish municipality and its societies). Moreover, in the interwar period, the majority language was allowed to replace Judeo-Spanish completely in a fast or slow fashion, depending on the territory, in terms of the higher level of interethnic communication domain (work, public administration, education and army).

c) Involvement of Belgrade Sephardi in the multilingualism of the educated and educational multilingualism

When it comes to multilingualism during the time of modernization, it is interesting to analyse the participation of Sephardi in what Đurić (2013: 401) denotes as “multilingualism of the educated” and “educational multilingualism”. According to the author, this phenomena “played (...) a significant role in the modernization of Serbia”.

²⁰ “Sin gramatica, sin vocabulario, sin sus caracteres, abandonada á una irresponsable voluntariedad esta ella tan estropeada, cuanto varios son los estados que los judios españoles moran”. (Pulido, 1905: 125)

Being a member of respected Davico family, Abram B. Davico (born in Belgrade in 1906 and died in Palestine in 1934) wrote his mother Streja letters that testified that the Sephardic elite wrote in French²¹ in their personal correspondence. In 1933, some of his letters were translated into Serbian and published entitled *Letters to my Mother. Letter Fragments from Palestine*. Only one letter was written in Serbian, at the explicit request of his mother, who wanted to read it at the meeting of *Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO)*. In this letter, Abram said that he preferred writing in French:

“It is interesting that, when I am writing to you, I have realized that it is easier for me to express myself in French. This is an example of how we the Jews have been wanderers until now, who always borrow somebody else's language, somebody else's customs and generally somebody else's cultural achievements”. (Davico, 1933: 21)

However, the letter reveals that Davico and other young Zionists spoke Serbian among themselves, while attempting to use Hebrew more at the workplace:

“(…) it is not sufficient to be in the Land of Israel so that Hebrew would become our language suddenly, in which we express ourselves effortlessly.”(Davico, 1933: 21)

According to other historical documents, it can be seen how foreign languages were used by other members of the Davico family about whom Krinka Vidakovic-Petrov (2010: 308) claims that it “played an avant-garde role in the community during a period of critical significance in the transformation of the Sephardi collective identity in the XIX century”. From the letters written between 1822 and 1830, it can be seen that progenitor of the family, David Haim, and his sons were in complete trade correspondence with Prince Milos Obrenovic in German²² (Alkalaj, 1927: 22-25). Apart from this, Abram Davico's father (1870-1913), the lawyer Benko S. Davico (1854-1918), renowned banister, diplomat and writer, translated numerous literary works written in Spanish (Stojanović, 1999: 501; Vidaković-Petrov, 2010: 310). According to the letters preserved in the Archives of Serbia, Haim's spouse Lela Davico wrote in German to her Serbian

²¹ Regarding world's languages, the French had the greatest impact on the awareness of Sephardi considering language and its use. From the 18th century, this language in its standardized form and connected with French culture, started to enjoy a remarkably prestigious position among elites in France as much as European countries. The spread of French colonial power in the course of 19th century had an impact on French culture and its language being present all over the world. The one who dedicated time to the very spread in Jewish world is *World's Jewish Alliance (Alliance Israélite Universelle)*, the organization founded in Paris in 1860. Thanks to the widespread network of schools in France and Orient, Alliance succeeded in raising the level of Sephardic education significantly and promoting the French language and Francophone culture beyond France (Lebel, 2008: 147). Alliance schools never existed on the territories of Serbia, Bosnia and Hercegovina. The reasons for such state are yet to be investigated.

²² David Haim, alias Davico, was a respectful trader and business associate of the Serbian Prince.

friends, although she had a good command of Serbian, which can be found from her texts published in the Serbian publishing house of that day.

Based on the answers of participants in the *My family* poll (shown in *Tables 4-6*), on the question of their languages, and that of their parents and grandparents, conclusions can be reached about the foreign language choice among Sephardic population in Belgrade. It can be assumed that the level of language fluency was greater than polls showed, because data on languages of parents and grandparents are not a direct source. Apart from that, language fluency was directly connected with social and/or educational status of each individual.

Whenever it was possible, data from the poll were compared with data from studies on the history of foreign language teaching in Serbia. The general account of basic trends will be given without details. In the Serbian educational system, teaching foreign language was introduced at the same time when the modernization of the educational system started in the 1840s. For a long time, this subject was exposed to various influences such as concrete conditions for teaching development, both foreign and country policies in language choice and ongoing political, social and cultural ideologies (Filipović et al, 2006: 114; Ignjačević, 2006; Krnjajić-Cekić, 2010: 125). Political parties were supported by great forces and were under their influence in terms of culture and intellect, especially in the second half of the 19th century (Damljanović; Končarević 2010: 34). The French and German languages had the longest and the most profound tradition in language teaching in Serbia, developing simultaneously with the general development of Serbian educational system and higher education, especially in the last third of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries (Stikić, 2009: 238; 2012: 24). The fluency of both languages was considered as a prerequisite among the educated (Stikić, 2009: 237-238; Krnjajić-Cekić, 2010: 126). Having been introduced later in the 1880s, and smaller in scope than French and German respectively, teaching Russian had a greater impact on the Serbian elite than on other social classes (Damljanović; Končarević, 2010: 34). Teaching the English language was initiated at the same time, but it was not developed until the 1930s. It reached its full potential in the second half of the 20th century (Ignjačević, 2006: 216-217).

In the first group of informants (born between 1840 and 1870, see *Table 4*), the most representative language was German (38%) on an equal basis to both sexes (36% of women and 38% of men). Contrary to German, the French language was spoken by 38% of men and only 9% of women. Apropos of other international languages, it can be noted that only men possessed a modest knowledge of both English (13%) and Italian (8%). If German, the language of the neighbouring Austro-Hungarian Empire, is excluded, Sephardi know little of local languages,

such as Turkish (8%), Romanian (8%) and Hungarian (4%). The same goes for Jewish languages such as Hebrew (4%) and Yiddish (4%).

Table 4: Foreign languages that Sephardi born between 1840 and 1879 knew

Languages	total	24	women	11	man	13
		%		%		%
Hebrew	1	4	0	0	1	8
Yiddish	1	4	0	0	1	8
German	9	38	4	36	5	38
French	6	25	1	9	5	38
English	3	13	0	0	3	23
Italian	2	8	0	0	2	15
Russian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portuguese	0	0	0	0	0	0
Turkish	2	8	0	0	2	15
Romanian	2	8	1	9	1	8
Bulgarian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hungarian	1	4	1	9	0	0
Albanian	0	0	0	0	0	0

As for the second group, consisting of subjects born between 1880 and 1917 (see *Table 5*), both German and French were more popular, given the fact that 47% of them knew German and 38% French. In the case of German, the distribution by gender was completely equal (47% in both sexes). In the case of French, if these results are compared with the results of older generations, the situation is also equal. Women were outnumbered by men (37% of women and 40% of men), but nowhere near to the extent as in the first group of subjects. This is the result of the higher level of education among women at the end of 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries. The fluency in other world languages shows the following tendencies: stagnation in English, a small rise in Russian and a significant increase in Italian (from 8% to 21%). The knowledge of local languages is still modest, and representative languages are only Romanian (6%), Bulgarian (3%) and Hungarian (3%). However, there is a modest increase in Hebrew (9%), which only one woman and two men knew.

Table 5: Foreign languages that Sephardi born between 1880 and 1917 knew

Languages	total	34	Women	19	Men	15
		%		%		%
Hebrew	3	9	1	5	2	13
Yiddish	0	0	0	0	0	0
German	16	47	9	47	7	47
French	13	38	7	37	6	40
English	4	12	3	16	1	7
Italian	7	21	5	26	2	13
Russian	1	3	0	0	1	7
Portuguese	0	0	0	0	0	0
Turkish	0	0	0	0	0	0
Romanian	2	6	2	11	0	0
Bulgarian	1	3	0	0	1	7
Hungarian	1	3	0	0	1	7
Albanian	0	0	0	0	0	0

When it comes to the third group of informants born between 1918 and 1942 (see *Table 6*), German (50%) and French (60%) fall into the popular languages compared with the previous two groups. But despite their rise, the English language exceeded them, experiencing a real boom in the second half of the 20th century. For the first time, French is more representative than German, thanks to links between Serbia and France, its ally at the time and after World War One. Although the results of the four most representative languages are completely equal, the same results in women show different values, and regarding English, such values are stunning (86%). The knowledge of local languages among the third group of informants is insignificant, seeing that only one woman knew Albanian.

Table 6: Foreign languages that Sephardi born between 1918 and 1942 knew

Languages	total	10	women	7	men	3
		%		%		%
Hebrew	2	20	2	29	0	0
Yiddish	0	0	0	0	0	0
German	5	50	3	43	2	67
French	6	60	4	57	2	67
English	8	80	6	86	2	67
Italian	5	50	3	43	2	67
Russian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portuguese	1	10	0	0	1	33
Turkish	0	0	0	0	0	0
Romanian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bulgarian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hungarian	0	0	0	0	0	0
Albanian	1	10	1	14	0	0

Conclusion

In the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries, modernization and the creation of new national states in the Balkans, which is the case of Serbia, changed the political and social situation significantly in the whole region, influencing the language repertoire of the Belgrade Sephardi. Long-term multilingualism came to an end, which in the Ottoman Empire had dominated the fields of inter-ethnic communication. A new hierarchy was established among languages (national/majority versus ethnic/minority, standard versus spoken languages/dialects/jargons). The rate of knowledge of the Balkan languages soared in due course, while the use of modern international languages grew progressively. The Belgrade Sephardi started to follow modern trends in foreign language learning, being particularly interested in both German and French, and less interested in both Italian and English. Traditional multilingualism transformed into a multilingualism of the educated, who had a good command of different languages because of contemporary education development.

The analysis of language choice among Belgrade Sephardi longitudinally manifested itself as maintenance/replacement of Judeo-Spanish as an ethnic language and towards the study and use of individual foreign languages. This analysis shows that there is an uninterrupted and direct link between language choice and use on one hand and different social and psychological structures on the other. This means that for chosen language analysis, the context is necessary which is provided by the social and cultural history of the Sephardi community in Belgrade, since it offers some information of the utmost importance for interpreting studied phenomena. However, the given analysis of language choice among Belgrade Sephardi simultaneously contributes to their social and cultural history, as well as the history of Belgrade and Serbia in general. Moreover, the analysis gives insight into the way the Sephardic worldview changed and reached decisions (according to their wishes or not, consciously or subconsciously) in terms of their individual and social identities.

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