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Teaching and Learning Resources for Ladino: Current Use and Needs for Further Development

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Abstract

The present article explores the use of teaching and learning resources (TLRs) among 31 learners of Ladino, a Romance minority language traditionally spoken by descendants of Sephardic Jews who were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the 15th century. The main purpose of the study is to provide a picture of current use of TLRs among learners. The study further discusses perceived needs for additional and/or updated TLRs, as expressed by learners and teachers of Ladino. The results show a mixed use of resources, encompassing traditional textbooks, grammars, and dictionaries, as well as an extensive use of resources not primarily produced as TLRs, such as articles, videos, chat groups, etc. Learners combine available resources and shape their own learning experience. A majority of the learners, as well as many teachers, point at enhanced opportunities for communication as a major need.

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Introduction

Ladino is a Romance language traditionally spoken by members of the Sephardic diaspora, descendants of the Jewish population that was exiled from the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the 15th century. The language is also known as Judaeo-Spanish, *djudeoespanyol*, *djudezmo*, *djudyo*, as well as other names, including *muestra lingua* or *muestro espanyol* ('our language' or 'our Spanish'; for an historic overview and a discussion on Judaeo-Spanish glottonyms, see August-Zarębska, 2020; Bunis, 2016; 2018). In the present article, the author uses *Ladino* to denote the language but respects other choices among participants.

Once thriving in major Sephardic centres such as Salonica, Izmir, and Istanbul, Ladino is now an endangered language due to the Holocaust and other historical and contemporary reasons. From Salonica alone, more than 90% of the city's then approximately 50 000 Ladino speakers perished in the Nazi death camps, and only a handful of speakers now remain (cf. Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2000; Mazower, 2006; Naar, 2016). Larger, but decreasing, communities of speakers exist in Istanbul, in Israel, and in parts of the Americas (cf. Harris, 2011).

After the Second World War, majority language policies in countries such as Turkey and Israel, as well as the lack of schools offering classes in Ladino, have led to an almost complete break in intergenerational language transmission (August-Zarębska, 2024; Gerson Şarhon, 2011; Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999; Zuckermann, 2020). Recently, an initiative offering extra-curricular activities in Judaeo-Spanish for young children in Israel has been launched (personal communication with Ladino revitalisation activist Aldo Sevi). Activities for young Sephardim are also being organised in the USA by Bivas.org, the Ladino High School Club of America (https://www.bivas.org/about/). However, no school is known to be offering regular classes in (or on) Judaeo-Spanish.

Migration in the 20th century to the Americas and other parts of the world has resulted in an ever-more widespread Sephardic diaspora and increased contacts with majority languages like Castilian Spanish, English, and French. All of these factors contribute to further limiting the possibilities of regular contact among Ladino speakers (Kirschen, 2018). Ladino's chances of survival in the contemporary world are further aggravated by the fact that the majority of today's Sephardim no longer speak Ladino but, more often, the languages of the countries where they currently reside (August-Zarębska, 2024).

The number of Ladino speakers in the world today is unknown. Estimates are uncertain and range roughly between 50,000 and 100,000 speakers (Kirschen, 2023; Quintana, 2023). The majority of today's Ladino speakers are in their seventies or older and may constitute the last generation of mother tongue speakers (FitzMorris, 2014). However, since 2020, the language has seen a growing array of revitalisation efforts offering new venues and new resources for hearing, speaking, writing, reading, and learning Ladino (Kirschen, 2023; cf. Cruz Çilli, 2021). This has resulted in a growing number of new speakers, of Sephardic origin but also from other ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

The purpose of the present study is to provide an overview of teaching and learning resources (TLRs) used by Ladino learners, as well as to identify the needs perceived by

learners and teachers for further TLR development. The study seeks to offer a more detailed understanding of how learners participate in the revitalisation of a language that has relatively limited learning resources and where there has been little coordination among different language learning opportunities. The study does not claim to offer a complete overview of all available Ladino TLRs but sets out to paint a picture of what learners consider as viable resources for Ladino learning and of their – and a group of teachers' – views on those resources. By doing this, the study offers perspectives from current grassroots efforts of language revitalisation that may be of relevance also to speakers and learners of other minority languages who are struggling with saving endangered languages.

In the context of this article, the term *learners* is used to indicate any person who chooses either to engage in activities aimed at reviving Ladino as a heritage language by strengthening their pre-existing knowledge of the language, or to learn the language as a new speaker,[1] in line with Kirschen's (2023, p. 10) description of Ladino students.

Likewise, a *teacher* is understood as any person who purposefully engages in activities designed to facilitate other persons' language learning (regardless of whether the *teacher* is in possession of a formal teaching position or acts as a grassroots activist without any formal training as an educator).

In accordance with the broad definitions of *learners* and *teachers*, TLRs are understood as any resource that is intentionally used by a learner to learn or to improve pre-existing knowledge of Ladino, or by a teacher to teach the language to others. Consequently, TLRs may include resources that are explicitly produced for language teaching and learning purposes, as well as resources created for other purposes, but nonetheless used to teach or learn Ladino. With this conceptualisation of TLRs in mind, the following questions are asked:

1) What resources are considered as TLRs and used as such by Ladino learners?
2) What further needs for Ladino TLR development do teachers and learners see?

Background

Language revitalisation efforts for Ladino range from individual and community-based projects to university-based courses. The number of revitalisation efforts has surged since 2020, when Ladino speakers and learners took to online solutions to communicate and to create language learning opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Yebra López, 2021a).

Elliott (2021, p. 309; cf. Underriner et al., 2021) points out that a major challenge to revitalising an endangered language is the lack of available learning resources, a challenge exacerbated by the fact that publishers rarely see any profit in producing materials for minority languages. According to Elliott, this means that individual teachers or institutions need to take on the task to create TLRs by themselves. Grassroots commitment is common in language revitalisation and activists commonly produce their own TLRs, sometimes in combination with pre-existing resources, if there are any. This is also the case for a large part of current Ladino revitalisation efforts, which are often acted out as "individual or community-based endeavors" (Kirschen, 2023, p. 10).

Apart from teachers, the production of TLRs may also involve language learners and (other) members of the language community. While native speakers and language learners often may not be formally trained in linguistics or in language teaching methodologies, they can nonetheless provide valuable input for TLR development and assist developers in ensuring that new TLRs are accessible to the intended users, regarding content as well as format (for example, as e-books or online applications; cf. Zuckermann, 2020, p. 243).

According to Zuckermann (2020), teaching and learning resources for minority languages should ideally be produced in cooperation between linguists and what he denotes as "language owners"; that is, the speakers of a certain language. TLRs can help make a language accessible to new speakers. Equally important, TLRs for minority languages also provide heritage speakers with the opportunity to reactivate a language they may not have used for many years, or possibly never used actively. Furthermore, TLRs do not only facilitate language learning and recuperation, but can also function as transmitters of culture and traditions intrinsically connected to the language, and may even act "as forces of resistance and reclamation", according to Valijärvi and Kahn (2023, p. 2).

So far, few studies have investigated how Ladino is taught or learned. Koén Sarano (2001) retells her experiences of teaching Ladino at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. In her article, she shares valuable insights into the formation of a formal language revitalisation effort at university level. The teaching materials she created for her courses formed the basis of her two Ladino textbooks (Koén-Sarano, 1999a; 1999b), which have influenced Ladino teaching and learning also outside of their original context.

Refael (2001), also based in Israel, provides an historical overview of Ladino teaching and research in the country, and demonstrates the establishment of Ladino research as an independent field of study. He comments that most of the early Ladino TLRs were aimed at university students with an interest in pursuing scientific investigation on Ladino, with only one book aimed at "non-academic learners" (p. 92). Refael states that "clear-cut objectives must be specified" (p. 94) for teaching, and TLRs designed accordingly. For students interested in pursuing research, Refael underscores that TLRs must present the language written in the Hebrew alphabet, to prepare students for historic Ladino texts.

In their article, Santa Puche and Mitchell (2001) discuss a possible curriculum for a course on Judaeo-Spanish language and literature, emphasising the need for a course to include both Sephardic history and identity, as well as linguistic content and Judaeo-Spanish literary genres. Their suggestions are aimed at university students and require a highly specialised teacher or group of teachers.

Taking younger potential learners into account, Gerson Şarhon (2011) talks about Ladino's history and its current sociolinguistic situation in Turkey. She concludes that the last native speakers of Ladino were the generation born around 1945. Their children learnt Ladino but not as their first language, and their grandchildren have generally not learnt the language. Furthermore, many of the native speakers have lost great part of their fluency due to few opportunities to use the language. Of interest for revitalisation efforts, Gerson Şarhon's study

shows that the younger generations of Sephardim in Turkey show little interest in learning Ladino and would rather opt for Castilian Spanish.

In one of the most recent studies, Fredholm (2023; 2024) discusses Ladino teaching from a language revitalisation perspective, interviewing ten activists engaged in different forms of teaching activities. Among other things, the activists expressed a need for updated TLRs that cater for learners with different mother tongues, and that reflect the preferences of younger learners, including interactive, digital resources. In different ways, the activists produced their own TLRs, for instance by compiling articles, short stories, and other texts from different sources, by making language exercises or, in one case, adapting a pre-existing resource to learners' needs by translating a textbook into another language.

Minority language teachers' own production of TLRs can been described as a form of "teacher bricolage" (cf. Jaakkola, 2024, and the introduction to this special issue; see Lévi-Strauss, 1962, for the original notion of *bricolage*, and Hatton, 1989, for a discussion on "teachers' work as bricolage"). As for Sephardic language revitalisation and Ladino teachers' production of language learning resources, to a high degree these are phenomena that take place online (cf. Yebra López, 2025). Online fora where Ladino is used constitute digital communities where native speakers, heritage speakers, and new speakers meet and develop the language. Such fora may be understood as a form of online communities of practice. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015, p. 2) define communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly", further commenting that learning may be the purpose of people gathering, "or an incidental outcome" of interacting with each other as they share a common domain of interest, build supportive relationships, and "develop a shared repertoire of resources" (2015, p. 2). Communities of practice may share a physical space, for instance, a school or a workplace, but they may also exist online. This view implies that learning does not only take place in schools and formal settings like courses or classes, but also through opportunities without institutional support and in peer-to-peer interactions (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 6).

Online communities of practice can bridge geographical distances and facilitate learning together with other individuals who share a common interest (Abedini et al., 2021). As for language revitalisation, online communities of practice may create spaces for oral and/or written interaction in an endangered language whose speakers have little or no contact with other speakers in their daily lives. Such communities can also constitute friendly spaces where learners can be introduced to and welcomed by a community of speakers. The affordances of online communities of practice are highly relevant for a linguistic minority living in a worldwide diaspora like the remaining speakers of Ladino. Held (2010) suggests that the formation of a "Digital Home-Land", a kind of virtual territory where Sephardim can meet online, would be fruitful for communication in Ladino as a substitute for the lack of a common geographical, "offline" homeland. Yebra López (2021) revisits Held's concept of the Digital Home-Land, and argues that the implementation of successful online communities,

especially if they facilitate intergenerational communication, is vital for the future survival of Ladino, declaring that "the online realm constitutes the primary arena for the revitalisation of Ladino" (p. 4).

Ladino is indeed used, taught, and learnt in several online communities. These communities have seen an increase in activities and participants since the COVID-19 pandemic pushed more people to familiarise themselves with online meetings (Cruz Çilli, 2021; Yebra López, 2021a). Ladino was present online before 2020, though. One of the earliest and most successful online communities for communication in Ladino is the asynchronous e-mail "correspondence circle" of Ladinokomunita, founded by Ladino activist Rachel Amado Bortnick in 1999. (For the homepage introduction, see *Ladinokomunita*, 2025; for an historic overview, see Santacruz, 2019). Currently, it has approximately 1450 members from across the globe, and an archive of more than 60,000 messages in Ladino spanning a wide range of topics. Every message sent to Ladinokomunita is first moderated by a group of editors who correct words, spelling, or grammar before the message is made public to all members via e-mail. Building on Held's (2010) concept mentioned above, Yebra López (2021, p. 102) describes Ladinokomunita as "the pioneering and most iconic Sephardi Digital Home-Land to date", but he is also critical of the forum's normative stance on language accuracy (Yebra López, 2025).

Communication in Ladino is also present in other online fora, both for passive consumption (listening, reading), and for active participation through talking and writing in Ladino. For instance, the online *Enkontros de alhad* ('Sunday meetups'), broadcast via Zoom, YouTube and Facebook on a weekly basis since August 2020, offer presentations about the Ladino language, Sephardic traditions, and other topics. Another successful example is the *Ladino21* YouTube channel which documents speakers of Ladino in the 21st century, with regular updates. Facebook groups such as *Los Ladinadores* feature discussions, jokes, and other content, including learning resources on Ladino vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, there are several WhatsApp chat groups (e.g., *Echar lashon*, *Cozy Ladino*, *Cozy Solitreo*) where native speakers and new speakers interact and explore the language together.

Methods

The study is primarily based on an online survey targeted at Ladino learners, carried out during the autumn of 2023 and the first months of 2024. Information about the survey was published in online fora where Ladino is used. The information and a link to the survey were also distributed by Ladino teachers to current and previous participants in their classes. All-in-all, the survey was answered by 31 persons engaged in learning Ladino, either as heritage speakers reclaiming their family's old language, or as new speakers learning Ladino as beginners. Apart from basic background data (age, gender, self-estimated language proficiency in Ladino, knowledge of other languages), the survey contained questions on learners' individual aims with their Ladino studies, on which resources they use for learning the language (e.g., textbooks, other kinds of texts, videos, online or face-to-face classes, etc.), and on the learners' perceived needs or wishes for additional resources to facilitate or enhance their possibilities to learn Ladino.

The survey questions were written in Ladino, but participants were allowed to answer in any language of their choice. The majority chose to respond in Ladino, at times mixed with Castilian Spanish and/or English. The fact that instructions and questions were given in Ladino may have rendered them less easily understood for participants with lower proficiency in the language. However, this does not appear to have affected the responses to any great extent. A few questions remained unanswered by sixteen participants, the majority of whom had declared an intermediate or advanced proficiency level. Answers were occasionally provided after the wrong question (for instance, writing about what books a person reads as an answer to a question about personal aims with the language studies). This fact complicated the analyses as it required piecing together various answers to obtain a complete picture of a respondent's use of learning resources. However, most answers were clear and pertinent and therefore considered reliable sources of information.

Table 1 shows an overview of the learners who participated in the study.

Number of participants	31
Gender distribution	Female: 13 Male: 18
Ages	19–92
Years of study	Less than 1 year: 12 1–2 years: 2 More than 2 years: 16 No answer: 1
Self-reported Ladino language proficiency	Beginners: 12 Intermediate: 15 Advanced: 3 No answer: 1
Areas of residence	North America: 10 Latin America: 13 Europe and Israel: 8

Table 1. Participating learners.

Additional data

Ten interviews with Ladino teachers were conducted during 2023 as part of an earlier project on Judaeo-Spanish language revitalisation (Fredholm, 2023; presented in Ladino in Fredholm, 2024). The group of teachers, based in the Americas, Europe, and the Near East, consisted of six native or heritage speakers, and four new speakers of Ladino (five women and five men). For the present study, the teacher interviews have been reanalysed with an increased focus on statements about TLR use and expressed needs for Ladino TLR development.

To strengthen the researcher's understanding of teachers' and learners' statements about Ladino TLRs, a review of available resources for learning Ladino was also performed. Textbooks and other printed resources were found through online searches and through personal communication with Ladino teachers and learners. The educational content in social media groups and in the e-mail conversation circle of Ladinokomunita was also examined.

Analyses

The transcripts from the teacher interviews and the learner survey responses were reviewed multiple times and analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, statements on TLR use and TLR development needs respectively were categorised into two main themes (presented in the following sections of this article). Subsequently, sub-themes were identified within each theme. TLRs were subdivided according to format and purpose. Similarly, identified needs for Ladino TLR development were categorised according to types or formats, and related to the categories previously found for existing TLRs.

Ethical considerations

The study adhered to current research ethical guidelines as formulated by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet [Swedish Research Council], 2024). The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, about safe data storing, that participation was voluntary, and that their answers would remain anonymous in future publications. Consents for participation were collected prior to the interviews and at the start of the online survey. No questions were asked about personal background, creeds, ethnicity or other topics that might be seen as sensitive. Names of participants in interview transcripts and survey answers were pseudonymised before analysis. The collected data are stored in a safe, digital solution provided by the researcher's university and are accessible only to the researcher.

What resources do Ladino learners use as TLRs?

This section of the article presents results answering the first of the two research questions: *What resources are considered as TLRs and used as such by Ladino learners?*. Results regarding the second question, *What further needs for Ladino TLR development do teachers and learners see?*, are presented in the next section. In these sections, quotes in Ladino or Castilian Spanish from the survey answers have been translated into English by the researcher. The results are discussed in the conclusion where topics for further research are also suggested.

The survey responses revealed that heritage speakers and new speakers alike make use of a wide array of resources to learn Ladino or to improve their already existing knowledge in the language. The resources mentioned by the learners fall into two main categories. Firstly, learners referred to various TLRs that are explicitly produced for the purpose of teaching and/or learning Ladino, such as textbooks, or exercises provided by teachers. Secondly, there are resources that are not explicitly designed for educational purposes but which learners, nonetheless, choose to use as language learning tools. It could be argued that the latter category does not constitute proper examples of TLRs. However, these resources are included in the study since they were frequently mentioned by many learners, who reported that they actively and intentionally use them to enhance their language proficiency.

TLRs from both categories mentioned above encompass printed resources and digital resources available online, including teacher-generated content as well as learner-generated or learner-chosen content. This results in complex, individual mixes of resources varying from

learner to learner. Examples of institutionally produced resources appeared only to a smaller degree, consisting of a handful of textbooks, and a book on Ladino grammar. There is and has been little commercial interest in producing TLRs for Ladino, which is not surprising considering the small number of speakers and – at least so far – learners. A few printed textbooks have nevertheless been produced to date, and at least one more is currently being prepared (*A textbook of Ladino* (*Judeo-Spanish*), Yebra López, 2026, is planned for publication during 2026, according to personal communication with the work's author). These books will be further commented on below.

The blend of resources found in the survey responses can be compared to results in Fredholm (2023), where the interviewed teachers also presented a mixed use of resources, often combining different authentic media (texts, filmed interviews, music, etc.) as well as texts and exercises produced by the teachers themselves for their specific teaching purposes. One of the teachers had even constructed her own online learning platform, where teacher-produced TLRs were made available to participants in her online classes. The survey answers in the present study revealed that learners also actively choose and sometimes produce their own learning resources; for instance, one of the learners mentioned compiling his own dictionary, others write short stories in Ladino to practice using the language. The "teacher bricolage" of TLRs mentioned by Jaakkola (e.g., 2024) is, thus, mirrored in a "learner bricolage" of resources for learning. The following subsections paint a picture of the nature of this bricolage.

Learners' use of resources explicitly produced to learn Ladino

TLRs explicitly produced for Ladino teaching and/or learning purposes include printed textbooks, grammars, digital versions of books available in PDF format, and other digitally available resources such as videos and information on Ladino vocabulary, grammar, and expressions. This category also includes a number of Ladino dictionaries, such as Nehama (2003), or Perez (n.d.), that were mentioned in survey responses.

As declared above, the ten participating teachers in Fredholm (2023) explained that they use a variety of resources in their language revitalisation activities. However, only one of the teachers mentioned using any of the available Ladino textbooks, an English version of Koén-Sarano's two books *Kurso de djudeo-espanyol para prinsipiantes* and *Kurso de djudeo-espanyol para adelantados* (Koén-Sarano, 2002; 2003). Rather than relying on textbooks, the teachers, including the one referencing Koén-Sarano's books, resorted to a combination of other resources, such as teacher-generated exercises, authentic texts from different sources (short stories, poems, historic newspaper articles, etc.), and online videos.

In the survey, 10 out of the 31 participating learners claimed that they used one or several textbooks in their Ladino learning activities. Considering the scarce use of textbooks among teachers, the survey responses suggest that textbooks are predominantly used independently, outside of Ladino classes, and in combination with other resources. Only one among the ten textbook users did *not* also make use of other texts, not primarily written for educational purposes. These genres will be commented in the following section of the article.

Six of the ten learners who stated that they use textbooks chose to leave a comment about which books they read. Their answers show that they resort to a mix of books but do not reveal whether they use printed versions of the textbooks or digital copies that may also be available to them. The most popular textbooks among the participants were Koén-Sarano's *Kurso de Djudeo-Espanyol (Ladino) para prinsipiantes* (1999b), and its follow-up *Kurso de Djudeo-Espanyol (Ladino) para Adelantados* (1999a), or possibly their English versions translated by Gloria Ascher (Koén-Sarano, 2002; 2003). Four participants mentioned these textbooks but did not reveal which versions the used.

Three participants mentioned studying Varol's *Manual of Judeo-Spanish: Language and Culture* (2008) or its French original *Manuel de judéo-espagnol: langue et culture* (Varol, 1998). Each one of the three learners who used Varol's books also used Koén-Sarano's. One of them also mentioned a third title, Markova's (2018) *Beginner's Ladino with Online Audio*, which is a relatively recent addition to the Ladino textbook market. Two other publications, both written in Hebrew, were mentioned by a single learner, who used the Hebrew version of Bunis' *Judezmo: An Introduction to the Language of the Sephardic Jews of the Ottoman Empire* (English version, 1999a; Hebrew version, 1999b), as well as *Ladino Language: Reading, Writing and Speaking* by Gomel and Refael (2018).

Apart from textbooks, two learners also reported using Ladino dictionaries, such as Nehama's (2003) *Dictionnaire du Judéo-Espagnol*. Another learner mentioned consulting Marín Ramos' (2018) Ladino grammar published in Castilian Spanish, entitled *Gramática básica de Djudeo-espanyol*.

Apart from the printed books mentioned above, additional resources intended for language learning purposes can be found in social media such as the Facebook group *Los Ladinadores*, and in WhatsApp chat communities like *Cozy Ladino*, *Cozy Solitreo*, and *Echar lashon*. Among these fora, *Los Ladinadores* in particular provides its members with access to a library of documents designed to strengthen Ladino speakers' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. The resources that focus on vocabulary are arranged thematically, providing information on, for instance, animal names in Ladino, food, beverages, occupations, and so forth. In addition, the *Los Ladinadores* group provides learners with information about traditional proverbs in Ladino, orthography, pronunciation, important differences between Ladino and Castilian Spanish, and so forth. Four learners explicitly mentioned using social media groups like *Los Ladinadores* as a kind of TLR, but failed to specify which resources they used in these fora. Judging from the collected data, it is also difficult to know exactly *how* the available TLRs are used, as learners take part in the content on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Zoom not only to access specific resources, but for a bricolage of educational and social purposes, where resources explicitly produced for language learning blend with other resources not primarily intended for language learning. Further examples of the latter category are presented in the next subsection.

Resources not explicitly produced to teach Ladino

The use of texts, videos, social media groups, etc. not primarily produced for language learning purposes proved to be quite extensive among the learners, and sometimes difficult to separate from the use of the more traditional TLRs mentioned above. The choice to use such additional resources may be due to the relative dearth of available textbooks and grammars, but it also reflects the learners' wish to participate in everyday interactive communication in Ladino and to connect to other Ladino speakers, a wish not easily catered for by a mere textbook. Naturally, participating in online activities with other Ladino speakers may also be done for socialising, without any language-learning objectives (even if language learning may occur as a side effect, so to speak).

Printed resources

As mentioned above, learners' use of other printed resources was more widespread than their use of formal textbooks. In the survey, 18 out of the 31 participants stated that they use books, articles, and other texts not primarily written for educational purposes. This can possibly be attributed to the greater abundance and accessibility of such texts, compared to textbooks. A variety of original works as well as translations to Ladino are obtainable, both for children and adults, including newly-produced literary texts. To this can be added articles published in Ladino magazines.

Even if literary publications such as the above-mentioned are not primarily produced as TLRs, many learners mentioned using them as language-learning resources. Among the titles mentioned in the survey were Matilda Koén-Sarano's short stories about the well-known trickster of Sephardic folklore, Djohá (e.g., Koén-Sarano, 2018), the family chronicle *Fuyir de Paris* ('Escaping from Paris') by Rodríguez Fisse (2022), a translation of *Don Quixote* printed in Rashi[2] characters, *El Princhipiko* (*The Little Prince*) by Saint-Exupéry (2018), as well as unspecified texts by Tamar Alexander, Eliezer Papo, Elia Karmona, Aleksandre ben Ghiot, and Moiz Habib.

Two learners also mentioned that they used magazines published in Ladino as sources for learning the language, namely: *Aki Yerushalayim*, *El Amaneser*, and *Şalom*.[3] *Aki Yerushalayim: Revista Kulturala Djudeo-Espanyola*, founded in 1979, is the oldest Judaeo-Spanish periodical that is still being published, since 2019 predominantly online (Yebra López, 2021b). *El Amaneser* is a monthly publication available in print as well as in digital format. It started as a supplement to the Turkish weekly newspaper *Şalom*, that was once printed entirely in Ladino. Since 1984, *Şalom* features only one page in Ladino, the rest of the newspaper being published in Turkish (Liphshiz, 2015).

Digital copies of several older newspapers and magazines in Ladino are also available in online archives. For instance, the newspaper collection of the National Library of Israel[4] gives online access to a large collection of historic Ladino press from across the world. No learner mentioned using archival resources, but one of the teachers interviewed in Fredholm (2023) explained that he chose historic newspaper articles from his hometown, once a major centre of Sephardic culture, as one of the main sources of reading materials for his classes.

YouTube, Zoom, and WhatsApp as TLRs

The learners reported using several online resources as TLRs, reflecting a language learning potential some of the teachers interviewed in Fredholm (2023) also pointed out for online Ladino fora. One resource mentioned by learners was the weekly online meetups of *Enkontros de alhad*, which are broadcast via Zoom, YouTube, and Facebook almost every Sunday since 9 August 2020.[5] Apart from providing viewers with ample listening practice, the format also facilitates interaction by allowing the audience to type comments, questions, or greetings in the Zoom chat window or in the comment sections in YouTube and Facebook.

Listening practice is also available in YouTube videos featuring Ladino speakers, for instance in the *Ladino21* channel[6] that gives learners access to a variety of spoken forms of Ladino, as well as synchronous and asynchronous chat forums in WhatsApp, privately arranged weekly meetups with other Ladino speakers in Zoom rooms, and the aforementioned *Ladinokomunita* correspondence circle.

Four participants mentioned WhatsApp group chats as a specific learning resource. WhatsApp provides Ladino speakers at different proficiency levels with opportunities to establish regular contact with each other, and to communicate across large geographical distances. Several WhatsApp group chats exist, where learners have opportunity to ask other members about dialectal variation, vocabulary, morphosyntax, or other topics related to Ladino and to Sephardic culture. Conversations are mainly carried out in written format using Latin script, but communication is often enhanced by pictures and recorded audio messages. In particular groups, participants can also practice reading and writing Judaeo-Spanish in Rashi and Solitreo scripts, with tutoring from each other and from experts on these traditional writing systems based on the Hebrew alphabet.

In some of the WhatsApp groups mentioned above, corrective feedback from native speakers on spelling, word choice, and morphosyntax is abundant. The feedback provided, sometimes actively asked for, at other times offered spontaneously, has the possibility to turn chat conversations into veritable mini-lessons on specific features of the language. In a less direct form, corrective feedback on spelling and vocabulary is also provided in the *Ladinokomunita* conversation circle, where a group of appointed moderators correct and occasionally comment on the language in submitted e-mails before the messages are published for all members of the community to read.

As mentioned earlier, the *Los Ladinadores* Facebook group provides its members with resources specifically aimed at improving Ladino speakers' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. Three learners mentioned using the group to find reading materials in Ladino. Apart from the educational resources provided in *Los Ladinadores*, the Facebook group in itself may also be seen as a TLR, offering opportunities of linguistic input and output, even if that is not necessarily the explicit purpose when a member publishes a message in the group. n summary, communication within different groups, opportunities to ask questions, and the possibility to receive feedback or take part of feedback provided to other members can contribute to a broader learning experience.

Further needs to enhance Ladino teaching and learning

This section answers the second research question by providing examples of what needs teachers and learners see for further development of TLRs for Ladino. Apart from a recognised need of more language lessons and increased general practice (mentioned by seven participants), learners wished for updates of existing TLRs, further additions of books and other resources, and primarily, the creation of more spaces for communication in Ladino. As for lessons, the learners wished to see both online courses and in-person classes. One of the learners specifically recommended "clases virtuales que puedan visualizarse en cualquier momento" ('virtual classes that can be accessed at any moment'). For learners living in time zones far away from organisers of online courses, this could be a practical solution.

Updated or new books

In Fredholm (2023), nine of the ten interviewed Ladino teachers emphasised the need for additional and/or updated TLRs. This opinion was mirrored in many learner survey answers, albeit with some differences between teachers and learners. Seven teachers wished for new textbooks and would like to see them in printed as well as digital versions. Two of the teachers specified that young learners expect something more modern than the existing textbooks, preferably with interactive content and online. Moreover, one of the teachers wanted to see textbooks available in a wider range of languages to enhance accessibility for a broader group of learners.

Three teachers further specified that they perceive a need for textbooks that teach Ladino not only in Latin script but also written in Rashi and Solitreo scripts. These traditional scripts are taught to greater or lesser extent in some of the existing books but not in all of them. The same wish was not reflected in the learner survey responses. A single learner sought a TLR focusing on non-Latin script, specifically expressing interest in a book about the Ladino dialects of former Yugoslavia and Ladino texts written in Cyrillic script.

One teacher in Fredholm (2023) considered that the existing textbooks are too complicated and perhaps even demotivating for today's learners and would therefore like to see an update. Only one learner commented that any of the existing textbooks was too complicated (for his proficiency level), but as commented above, the use of textbooks was quite restrained among the learners, and it is possible that this reflects discontent with the existing resources. Overall, the expressed learner needs related to books in general were few, and no learner explicitly identified new or updated textbooks as essential for further Ladino studies. However, six learners did indicate a need for improved possibilities to find words. Five of them specifically mentioned the necessity for new, enhanced, or more accessible dictionaries, a requirement echoed by five teachers. One learner noted that new dictionaries could be made available in either printed or digital formats and expressed a desire for Ladino to be included in Google Translate.[7] The sixth learner simply stated that he needed "something that helps me with the words I don't know".

The answers suggest dissatisfaction with existing dictionaries; two learners emphasised the need for dictionaries that are user-friendly, "complete", and provide grammatical information, such as verb conjugation and noun gender. Another learner wished for an updated dictionary featuring "new words or words that didn't exist or weren't used that much before the Second World War". The requirement for an updated vocabulary was also mentioned by three teachers. One challenge regarding dictionaries, however, involves determining which languages to include. While two learners wished for a high-quality Ladino-English or English-Ladino dictionary, individuals from other linguistic backgrounds may prefer different language pairings. In Fredholm (2023), one teacher also specified the necessity for a dictionary aimed specifically at beginner learners; however, this was not reflected in the survey responses.

Constructive feedback

Providing feedback on language production is crucial for certain learners who might otherwise be hesitant to engage in written or oral communication due to concerns about their accuracy. Two learners expressed a desire for improved access to constructive feedback. Although this does not appear to be one of the major needs among the participants, considering the low number of respondents highlighting it, the comments are nonetheless noteworthy. Feedback on language accuracy (or the lack thereof) is currently available in informal settings such as the *Ladinokomunita* conversation circle, various WhatsApp group chats, and, to some extent, during synchronous Zoom meetings that some of the survey participants regularly attend. The request by one learner for "feedback without judgement" may indicate a feeling of strong language normativity in communities where the learner participates. The teachers interviewed in Fredholm (2023) showed varying degrees of normative attitudes towards linguistic variation and change; some sought to incorporate a diverse range of Ladino dialects into their classes, while others displayed reluctance towards different Judaeo-Spanish varieties and, particularly, towards influences from other languages.

Increased opportunities for communication

As shown in the subsection on resources not explicitly produced to teach Ladino, there are several online communities where Ladino is written and spoken, and learners view these fora not only as opportunities to meet other Ladino speakers – that is, to socialise – but also actively chose them as learning resources. Most of the survey participants – 25 out of 31 – expressed a wish for more opportunities to practice communicating in Ladino with other speakers (five individuals did not respond to the question; only one answered that she did not want any further opportunities to communicate with others).

These responses suggest that existing opportunities for communication may not be known to all potential participants, or that certain learners do not feel encouraged to join or do not know how to become part of these speaker communities. A lack of ability to use digital solutions such as Zoom or other applications for synchronous communication could possibly contribute to the perceived lack of opportunities to communicate with others.

Fear of not speaking sufficiently well may also affect some learners and deter them from participating in meetings. This was indeed seen in one of the answers, where a learner wrote: "No tengo confiensa en avlar bueno" ('I don't trust I speak well'). Lack of linguistic confidence was mentioned also by three teachers in Fredholm (2023), two non-native speakers and one heritage speaker. Though seemingly not a big issue among the learners who answered the survey, awareness of possible language anxiety may be important to open Ladino-speaking communities to more participants. Facilitating participation by creating more online meetings and/or by informing about the available opportunities could perhaps also be beneficial for certain learners.

Concluding remarks

The results show that Ladino learners and teachers make use of a wide array of resources to learn, teach, maintain, and develop the language. They do this by participating in predominantly online communities of practice where the language is being heard, read, spoken, written, and commented on. By doing this, learners and teachers alike shape their own unofficial syllabi, so to speak, by combining different available resources and by creating or adapting new resources as TLRs. Both teachers and learners combine resources in different formats and mix traditional TLRs with other resources. This blend of resources can be understood not only as a "teacher bricolage", as Jaakkola (2024) argues, but also as an individually and consciously chosen "learner bricolage".

Teachers and learners emphasised the need for learners to get into contact with other Ladino speakers. For the learners, this was the clearest expressed need for enhancing their Ladino proficiency. In other words, learners predominantly look for opportunities to communicate in Ladino, and to become members of communities of practice where they may develop their language skills through interaction with other speakers. For a few, this need is accompanied by a wish for an increased access to constructive feedback. Strong normative views among native speakers may, however, demotivate some learners (De Korne, 2021), or induce feelings of not belonging to a community of speakers (Dołowy-Rybińska & Hornsby, 2021). Therefore, providing various forms of feedback could be advisable. Self-correcting exercises might be one solution appropriate for some learners; in Fredholm (2023) one of the teachers also mentioned a need for TLRs that can be used without a teacher, that is, for learners who do not want to participate in classes or who may not have the possibility to do so.

Textbooks and other text-based resources, in print and in digital formats, serve an important purpose for Ladino learning and teaching. Most of the teachers did not use any of the existing textbooks but wished, nonetheless, for updated versions, indicating a perceived potential for enhancing their Ladino teaching. The upcoming release of Yebra López' planned Ladino textbook (Yebra López, 2026) will surely be a welcome addition to the existing collection of TLRs and to Ladino classes. Yet, textbooks seemed more important to teachers than to learners. The latter group saw a greater need for updated dictionaries or other tools to help them finding the right vocabulary, rather than additional textbooks.

Judging from the survey responses, it is difficult to say why textbooks were mentioned by few learners and whether this reflects a possible dissatisfaction with the content or level of the available books. The findings do perhaps echo the teachers' statements in Fredholm (2023) that available resources need an update to a format that appeals to modern learners. Other factors that may possibly limit the use of textbooks are difficulties to find some of them in print, and the fact that they are available only in a few languages (French, English, and Hebrew), which may not be ideal for learners with other linguistic backgrounds. Likewise, the only easily accessible Ladino grammar book is published in Castilian Spanish, which may render it difficult to use for some learners. This may explain why only one person mentioned it.

On the other hand, teachers and learners alike make frequent use of other text-based resources, such as short stories and articles. Facilitating the access to such resources would therefore be beneficial for teachers as well as for learners. There is probably an educational potential to didacticise online text sources for teaching and learning purposes. For instance, an increased access to archival materials like newspapers, letters, personal journals, etc., could be beneficial for teachers and learners who wish to work with authentic, historical sources, ideally in combination with a pedagogically curated selection of educational resources such as reading comprehension exercises, word lists, and so forth.

Gathering a smorgasbord of Ladino TLRs on an easy-to-use and freely accessible platform could possibly help learners (and teachers) to find more relevant materials for their learning (and teaching). Lists of resources are available, for example, in the *Kantoniko* website founded as a grassroot initiative by Gabor Szábo (https://kantoniko.com/en/), and in the newly opened American Ladino League homepage (https://americanladinoleague.org). Collections of resources such as these may serve as good examples and be further developed, ideally by persons trained in language education methods. To secure its accessibility over time, the *Kantoniko* or a similar site could ideally be funded by the *Autoridad nasionala del ladino* or some other institution to provide learners and teachers alike with a comprehensive selection of resources. Furthermore, considering that some learners seemed not to know where to find other speakers to communicate with, easy-to-follow manuals for online communication via Zoom or similar applications could perhaps strengthen Ladino speakers' opportunities to meet online.

The present article has provided examples of resources, activities and needs encountered in Ladino learning as a case of grassroot language revitalisation. Further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the multifaceted didactic *bricolage* that learners and teachers are engaged in. Insights into which resources and language learning activities prove most successful in creating proficient Ladino speakers would be beneficial for the planning of Ladino courses, and possibly also for other minority-language revitalisation efforts. Such research could ideally also assess how various projects for Sephardic cultural awareness (for instance, competitions in short story writing or Solitreo calligraphy) influence individuals' interest in learning Ladino.

Endnotes

1   The term *new speaker* may denote individuals who have learnt a foreign language through formal education, as well as persons who have developed communicative skills in a language other than their mother tongue in other ways. The term moves away from more traditional distinctions between native speakers and non-native speakers. For an overview and discussion, see Hodges (2024).

2   Ladino was traditionally written in Hebrew characters. In print, this could be done either with square Meruba letters or, more frequently, with the semi-cursive Rashi script. For handwriting, the cursive Solitreo script, also based on the Hebrew alphabet but very different from the printed scripts, was used. In Greek- and Slavic-speaking areas, Greek and Cyrillic scripts have also been in use. Since the 1920s, the Latin alphabet has mainly been employed, especially outside Israel. No official spelling rules existed but depended rather on individual preferences and/or influence from majority languages in different geographical areas where Ladino was spoken. The Latin script spelling conventions used by the *Aki Yerushalayim* journal were established in the 1970s and may be considered a modern standard used in several publications and fora, albeit not followed by all writers. (For an historical overview regarding Judaeo-Spanish writing conventions, see August-Zarębska, 2020; Bunis, 2019; Varol, 2002.)

3   For more information about the publications, visit their respective websites: *Aki Yerushalayim*: https://yerushalayimaki.wixsite.com/ladino *El Amaneser*: https://istanbulsephardiccenter.com/el-amaneser/?lang=en&v=efad7abb323e *Şalom*: https://www.salom.com.tr/news.asp?cat=17

4   The Israeli National Library newspaper collection is accessible at https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/newspapers.

5   For information about *Enkontros de alhad*, see https://esefarad.com/category/actividades/enkontros-de-alhad/, and the YouTube playlist https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFJlHs1AE7pWOABnaTrjLMMQStJhJ8kwO.

6   For more information, see Ladino21's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/c/Ladino21.

7   As of today, Google Translate does not include Ladino. However, an independent platform for machine translation between Ladino, Castilian Spanish, English, and Turkish has been launched with financial support of the European Union (see https://sefarad.com.tr/en/translator/). In the survey, eight learners answered that they knew that this platform existed, but only three had used it. The *Kantoniko* website also offers machine translation between Ladino, Castilian Spanish, Turkish, French, Portuguese, and Hebrew (see https://kantoniko.com).

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