INITIAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE GRAMMATICAL CHARACTERISTICS, INFLUENCED BY LANGUAGE CONTACT, IN THE SPEECH OF BILINGUALS SPEAKING BULGARIAN AND LADINO

Diana Klüh, Tania Avgustinova
Saarland University

The paper reports the initial observations on the speech of five bilingual speakers of Bulgarian and Ladino. The aim is to establish the grammatical characteristics, triggered by the situation of language contact. The empirical focus falls on the Bulgarian spoken by the five bilinguals. The objective is to isolate the peculiarities and analyze whether they can be explained as resulting from the influence of Ladino. The study has been carried out within the framework of an international research project on Ladino spoken in Bulgaria (Judeo-Spanish in Bulgaria: A Contact Language between Archaism and Innovation), financed by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft DFG).

Key words: Ladino, language contact, Judeo-Spanish

This article examines language-contact-induced grammatical features observable in bilingual Ladino speakers’ Bulgarian, with particular attention to possible Judeo-Spanish influences on their Bulgarian performance.¹

1. Introduction

Judeo-Spanish, also known as Sephardic², Djudezmo, Ladino or Spaniol, is the language of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492³, who found a reception

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² The name of the Sephards (Sephardim) is derived from the word S’farad. This word in Hebrew means “land in the west” (Nezirović n.d.: 101).

³ A clear presentation of the historical context is provided, for example, by Bossong 2008 and
within the borders of the then Ottoman Empire (cf. Hetzer 2001: 1–2). Very few Judeo-Spanish speakers remain in Bulgaria today. In 2011, the Bulgarian census showed that only 1162 people belong to the Jewish group (cf. Andreeva/Avgustinova/Fischer et al. 2022: 3). Specifically, Ladino refers to the “original” language that the Spaniards “brought” to the Balkans, which was based on Old Spanish with some elements of Hebrew. In contact with the languages found there, it underwent considerable changes. A major noticeable area of influence is the vocabulary: in Judeo-Spanish there are approximately 4000 words from Old Spanish, about 1500 from Turkish, ca. 500 from Hebrew and 400 to 500 from Greek, Arabic and other languages (cf. Moskona 2004: 19–20).

The Bulgarian Judeo-Spanish speaking community is exclusively bilingual, which gives rise to unique language contact situations affecting both languages at various linguistic levels. Studies conducted on Ladino communities in Bulgaria show that Judeo-Spanish has been phonetically and morpho-syntactically influenced by Bulgarian (cf. Andreeva/Avgustinova/Fischer et al. 2022). This observation raises a reciprocal question of the extent to which the Bulgarian language of such individuals may have been influenced by Judeo-Spanish. This article is an attempt to explore the latter perspective.

2. The speakers and their dialectal background

The observations presented here are based on recordings\(^4\) of five bilingual individuals (four female and one male), who grew up using both languages (Bulgarian and Djudezmo/Ladino) in parallel. The interviews of the five speakers studied in this article are recorded in Sofia in 2011\(^5\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>speaker</th>
<th>SP1</th>
<th>SP2</th>
<th>SP3</th>
<th>SP4</th>
<th>SP5</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sex</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jaspert 2019.

\(^4\) These data were collected during the study of the syntax and phonology of the Sofia variety of Judeo-Spanish by Bistra Andreeva (Saarland University), Snezhina Dimitrova (SU St. Kliment Ohridski), Christoph Gabriel (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz), Jonas Grünke (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz), and Elena Kireva (University of Hamburg). We are grateful for the generous permission to use this data.

2.1. Procedure with the recordings

The first step of our work with the recordings, was to transcribe the text of all files using the program Praat\(^6\) in order to coordinate the flow of each text with the corresponding audio file, so that collaborators of the project can work with the resource and add remarks on observed phenomena. In this way, we gain a very good overview of mutual work. Based on the results presented here, we upgraded our test materials (Bulgarian and Ladino) for the recordings that are currently underway. Adjustments were necessary, since after the first new interviews/tests it became clear how the subjects coped with the tests and what difficulties they had in completing the tasks. Obviously, the spoken language we are dealing with exhibits further peculiarities that cannot show up in writing. For our work, it is crucial to record as many people as possible, but since the number of remaining bilingual (Bulgarian and Ladino) speakers is critically small and they are of a very advanced age, our priority at the moment is to do the new recordings and study them in depth later.

2.2. The Speakers

In the recorded interviews, two (SP1, SP2) of them explicitly mention where they were born and grew up. For the other three (SP3, SP4, SP5) this can only be guessed from their manner of speech. In the course of their lives, all five speakers have moved to study or live in West Bulgaria (Sofia).

Only the speaker SP1, who was born in Yambol (East Bulgaria) and grew up in Karnobat (East Bulgaria), shows a characteristic reduction, i.e. a transition from \([e]\) to \([i]\), which often occurs in East Bulgarian dialects that are not in close proximity to the Yat border (Stoykov 2002, Antonova-Vasileva/Vasileva/Keremedčieva et al. 2014). Accordingly, the pronunciation кѝсило мѝля̀ко \([kìsilo mljàko 'joghurt']\) and сѝрини \([sìrini 'cheese']\) is natural for SP1 (Table 2, line 1), revealing that she is from Eastern Bulgaria, but in other cases she tends to produce features that are common to West Bulgarian dialects. Being also from East Bulgaria (Pazardzhik), the speaker SP2 does not show the \([e]\)\(\rightarrow\)[i] reduction (unlike SP1), but produces всjàки [vsjaki ‘every’]

\(^6\) From 24 minute in Ladino only.
instead of всеки [vseki ‘every’] as in this part of Bulgarian dialects. As for the speakers SP3, SP4 and SP5, they show mainly features of West Bulgarian dialects. With these specificities in mind, it is possible to consider all data jointly for revealing some general features.

Speakers SP1, SP3, SP5 use the ending -ме [-me] instead of -м [-m] for 1st person plural of the verbs of the first and second conjugation, which is typical for West and Southeast Bulgaria (Stoykov 2002): купиме [kupime ‘buy’], ядеме [jademe ‘eat’], говориме [govorime ‘talk’], пееме [peeme ‘sing’], покажеме [pokazheme ‘show’] – cf. Table 2, line 2. Another West Bulgarian specificity found in speakers’ recordings – particularly SP2 and SP5 – is the transition from [ja][e] in a stressed position: беха [beha ‘were’], некак [nekak ‘somehow’], отбегвахме [otbegvahme ‘avoided’] instead of бяха [bja-ha], някак [njakak], and отбегваме [otbgvahme] respectively – cf. Table 2, line 3. Other peculiarities of SP2, SP3 and SP5 are the use of тъзи [tăzi ‘this’] instead of тази [tazi] – cf. Table 2, line 4, and the confusion of aorist forms in the first conjugation, which is observed only with SP5 – cf. Table 2, line 5.)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>kisilo mljako, sirini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>-me [1.Pl]</td>
<td>kupime, jademe, govorime, pribere, mozhe, peeme, pokazheme, pocheteme, vidime, nahranime, osashtstvime, slushame, smjatame, pisheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>ja</td>
<td>beha, cheteha, nekak, po-redko, otbegvahme, nekakav, behme, vseka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>tăzi</td>
<td>tăzi poljana, tăzi duma,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>-ah instead of -oh</td>
<td>dadah, otidahme</td>
</tr>
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### Table 2

#### 3. Grammatical features

##### 3.1 Personal and possessive pronouns

When speaking in Judeo-Spanish, none of the five bilinguals adopts Bulgarian constructions with pronominal clitics, i.e. the actual use resembles the situation in modern Iberian Spanish (Fischer/Vilanova: 2018, Fischer/Gabriel/Kireva: 2014). Yet, the occurrence of certain “non-Spanish” constructions, most notably the clitic doubling of lexical accusative objects, is clearly attributable to the Bulgarian influence on Judeo-Spanish (Andreeva/Avgustinova/Fischer et al. 2022). Now, the reciprocal question is whether these bilinguals,
when speaking Bulgarian, would use any constructions of Judeo-Spanish. A review of all relevant recordings resulted in a database of constructions in Bulgarian that contain personal or possessive pronouns.

Altogether, there are six examples of clitic doubling with accusative (1a-d) or dative (1e,f) objects in both pronominal (1b-e) and lexical (1a,f) realizations. There is nothing unusual in the use of pronouns, except that the dative object in (1f) lacks the preposition на [na], which is attributable to the spoken modality of the interviews. Forms without на [na] in Bulgarian mostly occur in spoken language and affect mainly the long forms of the 1st and 2nd person of personal pronouns – cf. (Nicolova: 2017, 214).

1.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Има я статистиката</td>
<td>Ima_ja statistikata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>Ще ме викат и мене</td>
<td>Shte_me_vikat i mene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>Тях ги настаниха във еврейските къщи</td>
<td>Tjah gi_nastaniha văv evrejskite kăshti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>Мен веднага изпратиха</td>
<td>Men vednaga izpratiha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>Когато на мен ми се роди дъщеря и трябваше да я кръстя а-а Рита</td>
<td>Kogato na men mi_se_rodi dăshterja i trjavvashe da ja krăstja a-a Rita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>Майка ми ѝ беше много тежко</td>
<td>Majka_mi i_beshe mnogo tezhko</td>
</tr>
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The occurrences of the short forms of the personal pronouns show that they are used in a standard way (Avgustinova 1997), for example, clustering before (2a,c,g,i-l) or after (2b,h) the respective verb to avoid sentence initial position. The example (2l) illustrates the ethical dative.

2.

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<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Така ми се струва</td>
<td>Taka [mi_se_struva]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>Говореха ми като на малко момиче</td>
<td>Govoreha_mi kato na malko momiche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>Ние я нарекохме Малката Палестина</td>
<td>Nie [ja_narekohme] Malkata Palestina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>Толкова ни даваха</td>
<td>Tolkova [ni_davaha]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>И ѝ смених името, ма не беше довольна</td>
<td>I [i_smenih] imeto, ma ne beshe dovolna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>Хората ме посрещнаха</td>
<td>Horata [me_posrethnaha]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>Ние ги назихме</td>
<td>Nie [gi_pazihme]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>Запомнила ги тя</td>
<td>Zapomnila_gi tja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>Това ни беше беше мястото, където ние всъщност, според мене, още от деца осъзнахме, че сме евреичата</td>
<td>Tova [ni_beshe] myastoto, kădeto nie vsăshnost, spored mene, oshte ot deca osăznahme, che sme evreichta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>намери, а и аз вкъщи я имам, би трябвало</td>
<td>nameri, a i az vkăshti ja_imam], bi trjavvalo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With regard to possessive pronouns, there are both short (3b-f,j,k,m,n) and long (3a,g,i,k-m) forms in the recordings. Sometimes the long forms appear where one would pragmatically expect the short ones (3g,i). The long forms are preferred when a preposition is used (3l). Interestingly, a clitic doubling of the possessor is also found (3k), with possessive-reflexive full pronoun *своите [svoite ‘oneself’s’] replicated by the corresponding reflexive-possessive clitic *сi [si], a colloquial construction mostly used in North-East Bulgaria – cf. (Nicolova 2017: 247).

3.

a. това, което отличаваше нашето присъствие
tova, koeto oltichavashe nasheto prisstvie
b. разширяващата цялата ни гледна точка за възможностите
razshirjavashe tsjalata ni gledna tochka za vamzmosnostite
c. учителя ни беше от една страна един
ychitelja ni beshe ot edna strana edin
d. съседите ни бяха българи
sasedite ni bjaha balgari
e. при мене идва от а-а баба ми и дядо ми
pri men idva ot a-a baba mi i djado mi
f. братовчед ми дойде вкъщи
bratovched mi dojde vkshti
g. ние започнахме нашия живот
nie zapolnakhme nashija zhivot
h. където прекарвахме голяма част от времето си, преди да тръгнем
kădeto prekarvahme goljama chast ot vremeto si, predi da trăgnem
i. много ясно разкривах своя произход
mnogo yasno razkrivash svoja proizhod
j. не че българският ми беше по-беден,
ne che bălgarskiat mi beshe po-beden,
аз много четях български приказки
az mnogo chetjah balgarski prizakiki
k. запомнила ги тя от своите си родители
zapomnila gi tja ot svoite si roditeli
l. на нашата улица / на моите години /
na nashata ulica / na moite godini /
преди нашето съществуване
predi nasheto sashestvuvane
m. майка ми също се казваше Рахел
majka mi sashto se kazvashe Rahel
n. дядо ми беше търговец
djado mi beshe tărgovec

There are sporadic mistakes in the usage of short possessive forms: the reflexive possessive *сi [si ‘self’s’] is used instead of the personal one *ми [mi ‘my’] and the other way around:

(i) “там се запознахме със съпруга сi” [tam se zapoznakhme sas spyruga si] instead of “съпруга ми” [sapruga mi];
(ii) “преди заминаването ми моята съпруга още знаеше за книжарница във Лондон, където раздаваха ъ- такава литература, която беше забранена във социалистическa

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From the examples given so far, no specific influence of Judeo-Spanish on Bulgarian constructions with the personal and possessive pronouns is evident. However, perhaps the preference for using long forms of the possessive pronoun in certain cases is something that speakers have adopted from Judeo-Spanish. The currently available recordings contain a lot of kinship lexis, which patterns in very special way with regard to determinedness (Avgustinova 1998). Next recording sessions need to consider other thematic domains in order to provide realistic data on the distribution of personal and possessive forms.

3.2 The Verb

Aspect is a notoriously complex grammatical category, especially in cross-linguistic studies. For this reason it is interesting to see whether the temporal-aspectual forms produced by the studied bilinguals Bulgarian might be influenced by Judeo-Spanish, and even more so since problems with aspect use in Judeo-Spanish have already been registered (Fischer/Vega Vilanova 2018: 144–150).

A primary view of available Bulgarian recordings suggests that almost all speakers prefer imperfective aspect verbs and imperfect temporal forms (1 a-e)\(^7\). To check if this is really the case, all verb forms were taken out and divided according to tenses into present, aorist, imperfect, perfect, plusquamperfect and future tense (Diagram 1). For a summary of speakers and respectively produced temporal forms see (Diagram 2).

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\(^7\) Since the number of forms is very high (over 100), only some samples are given here, while in the following we use diagrams. In this article, we formulate initial hypotheses that need further elaboration and validation regarding the use of aspect and in comparison to Ladino.
понеже дойдоха много ученици от София и мен понеже ме знаеха, че бях добра ученичка, взимаха ме за преподавателка
беше в понеделник, вторник е девети септември, празник и те ме изчакваха
Говорихме на ладино, особено когато искахме да прикриваме нещо от други деца
Видяхте поради колко причини, вече започвахме да го отбягваме.
ние се събирахме двете да си кажем нещо и ако, а-ако някой ни чува, ние преминавахме на ладино
Ponezhe dojdoha mnogo uchenici ot Sofja i men ponezhe me znaeha, che bjah dobra uchenichka, vzimaha me za prepodavatelka
beshe v ponedelnik, vtornik e deveti septemvri, pražnik i te me izchakvaha
Govorihme na ladino, osobeno kogato iskahme da prikrivame neshto ot drugi deca
Nie se sâbirahme dvete da si kazhem neshto i ako, a-ako njakoj ni chuva, nie preminavahme na ladino

Diagram 1

The speaker SP5 shows a clear preference for using mainly aorist (and in some cases present) temporal forms. However, one should also consider his level of education – being a linguist and a translator he tends to produce more standard Bulgarian. He alone uses 32 forms, while the other four speakers use a total of 44 forms. Therefore, one should not give too much weight to this speaker’s data in the overall picture.
In (Diagram 3), only the aorist and imperfect forms are included, as well as those for which it is not possible to say with certainty whether they are aorist or imperfect. From the aorist temporal forms there are only two that are in the imperfective aspect; from the imperfect temporal forms none are in the perfective aspect; in the third column, the perfective aspect occurs only three times.

Diagram 3

The fact that all other verbs in the third column have the imperfective aspect, and that in the imperfect temporal forms all verbs have the imperfective aspect, suggests that all verbs in the imperfective aspect in the third column are in the imperfect tense. Under this assumption, the diagram must look like (Diagram 4).

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8 Recall that in case of imperfect-aorist syncretic forms, the distinction can only be made in 2nd and 3rd person singular.
The results presented are accord with the initial hypothesis about speakers’ preferences (a) for expressing past events in imperfect tense, and (b) for verbs of the imperfective aspect, which clearly points to the Judeo-Spanish influence on the Bulgarian temporal-aspektual system by simplifying it accordingly in a genuinely bilingual reality. As a matter of fact, preliminary observations within the project “Judeo-Spanish in Bulgaria: A Contact Language between Archaism and Innovation” also reveal a preferential imperfect usage in the Judeo-Spanish recordings of the same bilinguals (with the notable exception of SP5).

4. Conclusions

From the initial observations regarding the speech of the five bilingual speakers, the conclusion can be drawn that Judeo-Spanish may have influenced Bulgarian in particular ways. From such a perspective, remarkable phenomena – like the tendency to use long forms of possessive pronouns or the preference for verbs of imperfective aspect and imperfect temporal forms in Bulgarian – can be explained. At this stage, however, these are working hypotheses which need further exploration, e.g., in the ongoing project “Judeo-Spanish in Bulgaria: A Contact Language between Archaism and Innovation”.

We are very grateful to the editors of Contrastive Linguistics for their valuable comments and advice that have benefited our research. Some of these notes will find their way into our research planned as a continuation of this study.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


ПЪРВОНАЧАЛНИ НАБЛЮДЕНИЯ ВЪРХУ ГРАМАТИЧНИТЕ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ, ПОВЛИЯНИ ОТ ЕЗИКОВ КОНТАКТ, В РЕЧТА НА БЪЛГАРИ, ГОВОРЕЩИ ЛАДИНО

Диана Клю, Таня Августинова
Университет на Саарланд

В статията се представят предварителни наблюдения върху говора на четирима души, самоопределящи се като двуезични носители на български и ладино. Задачата е да се установят граматични характеристики, предизвикани от въпросния езиков контакт. Емпиричният фокус е върху българския на четиримата говорители. Целта е фиксиране на особеностите и доколко те могат да бъдат разглеждани като резултат от влиянието на ладино. Изследването се провежда в рамките на интердисциплинарен проект, посветен на езика ладино в България (Judeo-Spanish in Bulgaria: A Contact Language between Archaism and Innovation) и финансиран от немската научна фондация (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft DFG).