Mainland vs. Island: A Comparative Morphological Study on Spanish-Turkish Contact

Rey Romero
University of Houston-Downtown

1. Introduction

Judeo-Spanish is an endangered dialect spoken by some Sephardic communities in Turkey, Israel, Western Europe, and the United States. The present study aims to compare the morphological analysis of two Sephardic communities in Istanbul and the nearby Prince Islands, Turkey. When compared to the morphology of healthier varieties, endangered languages display variation, especially attrition, in morphological categories (Andersen 1982, 97; Janse 2003, ix-x). In this study, I will analyze variation in gender and number agreement. In addition, morphological attrition and other structural changes are attributed to the reduced domains in which the language is confined (Schmidt 1985, 4; and specifically for Judeo-Spanish, Harris 1979, 260-1). The motivation for comparing the Istanbulite and the Prince Island varieties ramifies from the different social domains in which the language is used in these communities. Basically, it appears that the Prince Island community is more cohesive and contiguous, at least in the geographic sense, and in many instances households are composed of three generations with varying degrees of Judeo-Spanish proficiency. On the other hand, the Istanbulite community, although more numerous, is fragmented and spread in an urban setting. Are differences in linguistic domains reflected in the morphology of gender and number? Specifically, 1) Are there any similarities or differences between these populations regarding morphological attrition correlated with age? 2) Do gender and number attrition follow a similar rate? 3) Does either population show higher attrition rates?

2. Judeo-Spanish in Istanbul and the Prince Islands

After their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula in the late fifteenth century, Spanish-speaking Sephardic Jews settled in the Ottoman Empire, primarily in the Balkans and in the Mediterranean basin. Under the Muslim precept of zimmi, Sephardim were permitted to run their own religious, legislative, and educational institutions, creating very little incentive to adopt the Ottoman Turkish language (Sachar 1994, 89-90). During most of the Ottoman period, Judeo-Spanish thrived in Istanbul as the dominant language of Ottoman Jewry, in spite of major efforts to adopt French and Gallicize the community in the late nineteenth century (Benbassa and Rodrigue 2000, 27-8, 60-4, 78-83, 102). In the aftermath of World War I and the subsequent disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Jewish communities under Turkish sovereignty experienced nationalistic language policies, thereby triggering the first significant Spanish to Turkish language shift (Benbassa and Rodrigue 2000, 101-2, 104). The first Sephardic settlements in the Prince Islands were contemporaneous to these Turkish-only policies, a reactionary movement towards the periphery, in order to escape discriminatory and nationalistic policies. The community in Büyükada was founded in 1904, during the initial stages of Turkification (Güleryüz 1992, 37-8). The Greco-Turkish population exchange in 1923 solidified Turkish hegemony in Istanbul, creating a tense environment among the non-Muslim minorities in the city. Over two-hundred families arrived in Heybeliada in 1940, shortly after foreign language education was prohibited (Güleryüz 1992, 39-40). In 1942, the Turkish government imposed heavy war-time taxation

on its non-Muslim subjects, which pauperized the Sephardic middle and upper classes. In addition, those who could not pay their debt to the Turkish state were imprisoned or sent to labor camps in Anatolia (Sachar 1994, 105-6). Jewish migration to the Prince Islands continued in the 1950s, as sixty Sephardic families settled in Burgazada (Güleryüz 1992, 41-2). In 1955, ethnic tensions in Istanbul culminated in the riots against the Greek and Jewish minorities in the district of Pera (modern Beyoğlu), accelerating the Jewish exodus to the periphery of Istanbul, and even out of Turkey to Israel, Western Europe, and the United States (Sachar 1994, 116; Benbassa and Rodrigue 2000, 186-8). These migrations continued in the sixties and seventies due to political crises and strife in Turkey (Sachar 1994, 116). By the 1970s, Spanish-speaking Sephardic Jews had established permanent communities and religious institutions in the three major Prince Islands of Büyükada, Heybeliada, and Burgazada (Güleryüz 1992, 37-41).

Currently, the mainland and the island communities differ in that Istanbulite Sephardim are more numerous, but no longer reside exclusively in their compact, traditional neighborhoods such as Balat (in the European side) and Kuzguncuk (in Asia). The urban community is dispersed throughout the city of Istanbul and its peripheral neighborhoods of Ulus and Nişantaşı, where some community centers, modern synagogues, and Jewish schools are located. In contrast, the Prince Island Sephardim often live in the same neighborhoods or streets, most of them congregate in the same social beach clubs, and, at least during the summer school break, children, parents, and grandparents live together, creating propitious opportunities for the intergenerational transmission of Spanish. However, in both locations the Jewish community is a dwindling minority, and they employ Turkish outside and inside the community network. Do these different social landscapes affect the morphological characteristics of Judeo-Spanish?

3. Background and Methodology

Research on languages in shift attested morphological attrition in the endangered variety, especially in comparison with healthier dialects or with the speech of the older generation. Dorian's (1973) work on East Sutherland Gaelic suggested that "generational patterning" correlated with rate and speed of change, and this was further emphasized in Schmidt's (1985) study on the Australian language Dyirbal. Schmidt's (1985) data demonstrated that "errors" in morphology and syntax in the younger generation were actually simplification patterns linked with age and a proficiency continuum (Dorian 1973, 415; Schmidt 1985, 44). Within the scope of morphological categories, Andersen (1982) claimed that an endangered dialect would not exhibit the same number of morphological categories as the healthy variety (Andersen 1982, 97). In terms of morphological inflection, Campbell and Muntzel (1989) indicate that variation in attrition results from obligatory morphological rules (such as agreement) no longer being applied or employed sporadically (Campbell and Muntzel 1989, 189). Specifically to gender, Dorian's (1981) study indicated that younger speakers and semispeakers increasingly failed to mark the feminine gender in East Sutherland Gaelic, opting instead for regularization favoring masculine gender. Lipski (1993) found similar results in his study on Spanish-English transitional bilinguals, who failed to agree determiners and adjectives with feminine nouns, also favoring masculine gender as the default (Dorian 1981, 124-5; Lipski 1993, 161-2). Specifically to number agreement, Dorian's (1978) research concluded that semispeakers opted for regularizing plural suffixes at the expense of irregular forms and phonological rules (Dorian 1978, 596-9). Lipski's aforementioned (1993) study also noted that transitional bilinguals tended to omit plural marking in determiners and adjectives (Lipski 1993, 161-2). Morphological attrition is the result of internal restructuring or external influence from the second language, as I will explain below. These methodologies are revisited in my study, as I aim to identify the progression of morphological attrition in gender and number in a proficiency-age continuum of the endangered Judeo-Spanish dialect.

Like the Peninsular and American varieties, Judeo-Spanish has masculine and feminine gender incorporated in its morphology. Male referents are assigned as masculine, whereas female referents are placed in the feminine category. Referents not having physical gender (semantic residue) are assigned gender according to their word endings (Corbett 1991, 35). Although with numerous exceptions, an encompassing pattern is that nouns ending in -a, -á, -ad, and -or are assigned the feminine gender, whereas the rest are given masculine gender by default. In addition, gender is expressed throughout inflectional morphology as determiners and adjectives agree obligatorily with the noun's gender. The

following examples, taken from my field work in the Sephardic communities of Istanbul and the Prince Islands, illustrate masculine (m) and feminine (f) gender agreement in Judeo-Spanish:

(1) el hahám israeliano
    the-m rabbi Israeli-m
    'the Israeli rabbi'

(2) la mujer israeliana
    the-f woman Israeli-f
    'the Israeli woman'

(3) el livro chiko
    the-m book small-m
    'the small book'

(4) la meza chika
    the-f table small-f
    'the small table'

(5) el arvolé viejo
    the-m tree old-m
    'the old tree'

(6) la sivdad vieja
    the-f city old-f
    'the old city'

(7) el mazal bueno
    the-m fortune good-m
    'the good fortune'

(8) la golor buena
    the-f fragrance good-f
    'the good fragrance'

In examples (1-8) above, determiners and adjectives agree obligatorily with the noun's gender. Similarly, number agreement has the same morphological distribution, but with more regular morphemes. Singular nouns (one) have zero morpheme, whereas plural (more than one) is conveyed with the suffix -(e)s. The epenthetic /e/ appears when the noun ends in a consonant. This morpheme also occurs in determiners and adjectives that agree in number with the noun:

(9) lo-s mansevo-s djudió-s
    the-pl boy -pl Jewish-plural
    'the Jewish boys'

(10) la-s ninya-s ermoza-s
    the-pl girl-pl beautiful-plural
    'the beautiful girls'

(11) lo-s haham-es israeliano-s
    the-pl rabbi-pl Israeli-plural
    'the Israeli rabbis'

(12) la-s mujer-es israeliana-s
    the-pl woman-pl Israeli-plural
    'the Israeli women'

My data on comes from a series of sociolinguistic interviews I conducted in Istanbul in 2007 and in the Prince Islands in 2009. For the purpose of this study, I will only consider data from roughly the same number of participants within a similar age range from each location. This includes twelve participants from Istanbul, ages 30 to 73, and ten participants from the Prince Islands, ages 27 to 73. In order to obtain comparable data on gender and number agreement and following the methodology of Dorian (1981) and Schmidt (1985), informants were asked to translate orally sentences from Turkish to Judeo-Spanish (Schmidt 1985, 44-5; Dorian 1981, 117-8). The Istanbulite group was asked to translate sixty sentences in 2007. Since some sentences were edited, discarded or combined, the Prince Island group translated thirty sentences in 2009. The number of morphological tokens remained roughly the same. These Turkish sentences contained stimulus structures which required gender and number agreement in the Spanish rendering. A sample exercise of the translation task is the Turkish sentence (13) below:

(13) Anne oğluna bu sıcak günde çok su içmesini emrediyor
    'The mother told her son to drink a lot of water this hot day.'

The following is a representative sample on how informants translated this sentence. Informants are identified solely by gender and age:

(14) la madre ordonó a su ijo ke beva muncha agua en esta* kaente día (by F70)
(15) la madre le disho al ijo ke en esta* kaente día ke beva muncha ag[h]ua (by F58)
(16) la madre al iho le diho ke este día kaente ke beve muncho** agua (by M47)
(17) la madre está diziendo al ijo ke beve agua ke oy ay muncho** kalor (by F27)

The sentences in (14-17) contain irregularities in gender agreement. The examples in (14) and (15) identified with (*) have interpreted the masculine noun día as feminine since it ends in -a, with feminine agreement in the determiners. These irregularities are not considered in this study since agreement is still conveyed as part of a regularization process. However, examples in (16) and (17) indicated with (**) represent morphological attrition since feminine nouns in -a 'agua' and -or 'kalor' lack gender agreement in their determiners. This study focuses solely on the type of agreement irregularities present in (16) and (17). Percentages of lack of agreement were tallied for each speaker, compared within the same group, and consequently between the mainland and island locations.

4. Results Regarding Gender Attrition

Graph 1 below summarizes the percentage of morphological gender attrition for both the Prince Island and Istanbul populations. The y-axis indicates the percentage of feminine nouns with lack of agreement in determiners and adjectives. Speakers are organized from left to right, youngest to oldest. Speakers having the same gender and age but from different populations overlap in the x-axis. Although neither population shows direct and linear dramatic movement in token distribution, the general pattern in both the Prince Islands and in Istanbul shows that morphological gender attrition increases considerably in speakers younger than sixty. In addition, the youngest speaker in the Prince Islands (F27) displays a higher percentage of attrition with 32% of feminine nouns lacking gender agreement in determiners and adjectives, compared to the youngest speaker in Istanbul (M30) with 24%. Overall, as far as gender agreement, the Prince Island community displays higher percentages of attrition than the Istanbulite counterpart, a difference of 8%.

Graph 1. Lack of feminine gender agreement in the Prince Islands and Istanbul
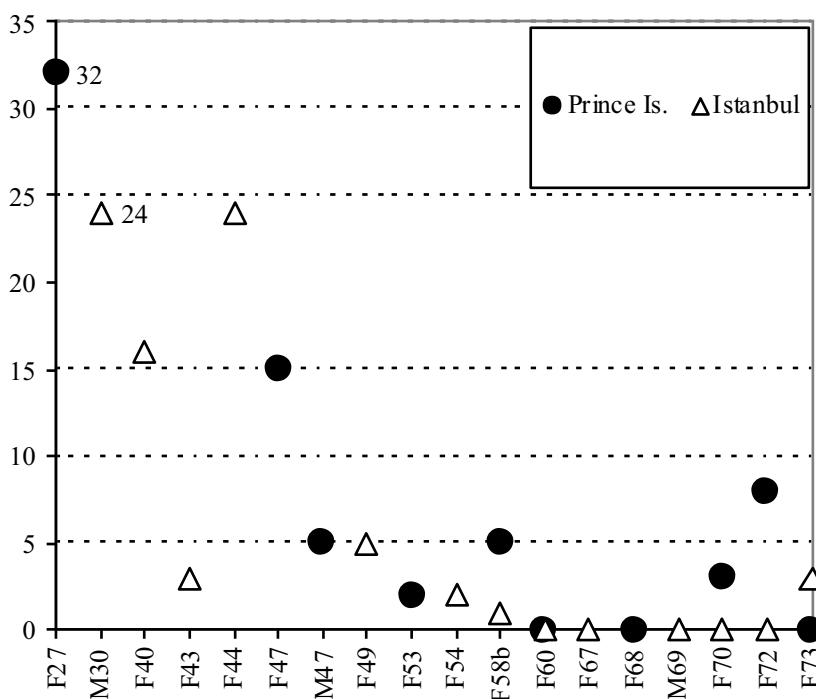
The following sentences illustrate both ends of the proficiency continuum in Istanbul (F73 and M30) and in the Prince Islands (F73 and F27). The lack of gender agreement in determiners and adjectives is similar to Lipski's (1993) study on English-Spanish transitional bilinguals (Lipski 1993, 161-2).

Istanbul (18) la kaza mía es vieja.
     the-f house-f mine-f is old-f
     'My house is old.' (F73)

(19) tu estás avlando una lingua ermozo.
   you are speaking a-f language-f beautiful-**
   'You speak a beautiful language.' (M30)

Prince Is. (20) <u>las muevas sivdades son serka de la mar</u>
                 the-f new-f cities-f are near the-f sea-f
                 'The new cities are near the sea.' (F73)

       (21) <u>los madres están pensando las muevas eskolas están bueno</u>
                 the-** mothers-f are thinking the-f new-f schools-f are good-**
                 'The mothers think the new schools are good.' (M27)

5. Results Regarding Number Attrition

    Graph 2 below indicates on the y-axis the percentages of morphological attrition defined as lack of plural number agreement in determiners and adjectives. This plot graph illustrates a higher tendency towards lack of number agreement in speakers younger than fifty-eight (compare to younger than sixty in gender attrition). This is true for both populations, although once again the youngest informant in the Prince Islands (F27) shows a higher percentage of morphological attrition at 19% compared to the youngest speaker (M30) in Istanbul, with 16% lack of plural number agreement. In comparison with gender attrition, the difference between both populations is minimal at only 3%.

Graph 2. Lack of plural number agreement in the Prince Islands and Istanbul
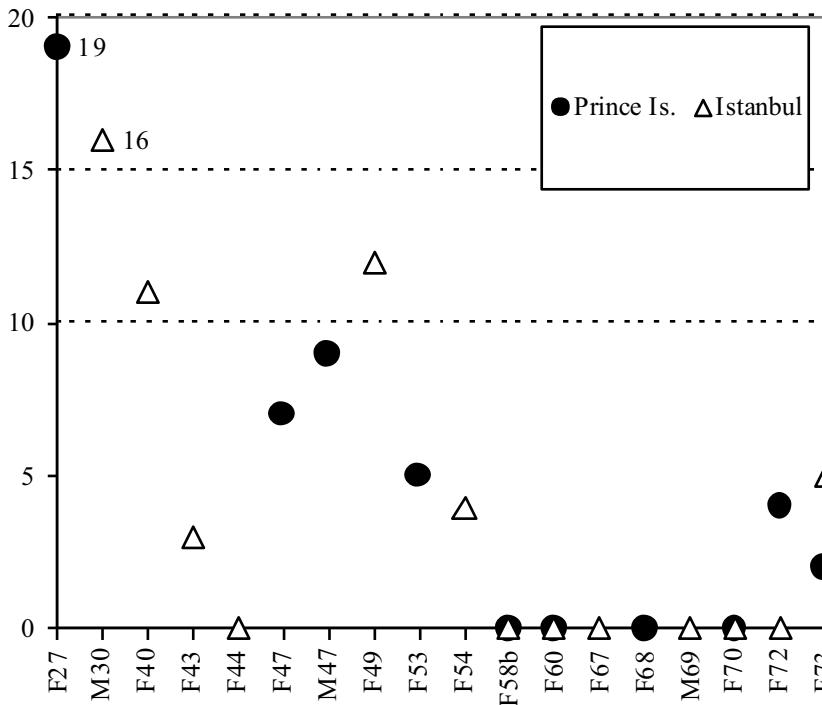
These following are representative sentences for the oldest and youngest speakers in Istanbul (F73 and M30) and in the Prince Islands (F73 and F27). The lack of plural agreement in the determiners and adjectives was also attested in the Spanish of transitional bilinguals (Lipski 1993, 161-2).

Istanbul (22) <u>los ermanos meldan livros grandes.</u>
           the-pl brothers read book-pl big-pl
           'The brothers read big books.' (F73)

(23) <u>kontente estudentes están en la eskola.</u>
      happy** student-pl are at the school
      '[The] happy students are at school.' (M30)

Prince Is. (24) <u>estos ombres tienen muy buenos echos.</u>
           these men have very good-pl job-pl
           'These men have very good jobs.' (F73)

(25) <u>este ombres tienen muy bueno echos.</u>
      this** men-pl have very good-** jobs
      'These men have very good jobs.' (M27)

In order to investigate if the attrition data in these two populations were statistically different, I conducted an Independent-Samples t-test both for gender and number attrition. The results for gender had a *df*=18 and a t-value of 0.2486 < 2.10, therefore p>0.05 and we cannot conclude that there is a difference in gender attrition between Istanbul and the Prince Islands. Similarly, the t-test for plural attrition with a *df*=18 and t-value of 0.2768 < 2.10, therefore p>0.05 showed that we cannot attest a difference in plural attrition between Istanbul and the Prince Islands. These results suggest that geography (mainland v. island) does not play a significant role in the variation observed in these populations, and that these two communities are actually indistinct from one another, comprising a larger speech community in the Istanbul metropolitan area.

6. Conclusion

Graphs 1 and 2 can be interpreted through our research questions: 1) Why are speakers younger than sixty and fifty-eight exhibiting the highest attrition rates? 2) Why is attrition higher in gender than in number? 3) Why is attrition higher in the Prince Islands? From an emic approach, speakers who are sixty years and younger acquired Judeo-Spanish during a period of strong nationalistic campaigns which included the effects of the discriminatory war-time tax and the anti-minority riots of 1955. The generations born after the mid twentieth century also experienced the quick reduction of linguistic domains, atrophying Judeo-Spanish to a mere household dialect. These generations grew up in a dwindling Jewish community, depleted by major exoduses to the Americas, Western Europe, and the nascent State of Israel. Limited linguistic space, a reduced population, and the assimilation of the younger generations to Turkish language and culture can explain the higher attrition percentages in informants younger than sixty.

The second question is rooted in the dynamics of language contact. Andersen (1982, 94-5), Thomason and Kaufman (1988, 52-3), Campbell and Muntzel (1989, 186-7), and Pavlenko (2004, 50-2) claim that languages in shift tend to imitate the dominant language by preserving linguistic characteristics present in the dominant language and by deleting those alien to its structure. Since Turkish marks number, albeit poorly, this morphological characteristic may help preserve number in Judeo-Spanish. Number morphology in Turkish is exemplified in (18) and (19) below:

(26) <u>bu yaz gece-ler sıcak</u>   (27) <u>kız-lar okulda bana söyledi-ler</u>
    this summer night-plural hot   girl-plural at.school to.me told-plural
    'These summer nights are hot'   'The girls told me at school'

In (26), the plural is only conveyed in the noun 'gece-ler', without any agreement. However, in (27), the plurality of the subject 'kız-lar' is also marked in the verb 'söyledi-ler.' It would suffice for this study to indicate that Turkish marks plural agreement when the noun is human or higher animal and only when other elements are interposed between the subject and the verb. In spite of poor plural morphology, one could argue that the number category has been preserved due to Turkish influence. In any instance, both communities suffer higher attrition rates in morphological gender than in number.

The third question requires further investigation. Even though the Prince Islands provide more social domains and geographical distance from Turkish Istanbul, in this study it appears that attrition is higher in the Prince Islands. These are surprising observations. The Sephardic community in the Prince Islands is close-knit and more generations live together during the summer months; I expected that, given these higher possibilities for intergenerational transmission and practice, attrition would be lower than in the dispersed Istanbulite community. However, as the aforementioned Independent-Samples t-test demonstrated, geography does not play an important role in determining variation in attrition, and it appears that both communities actually represent one contiguous speech community. If there was any geographically-based variation in the past, it was probably attenuated by mainland-island migration patterns and social networks. As future research, I will analyze additional morphological and syntactic features and include a detailed study on the Istanbul-Prince Island community networks, which may provide a better understanding of the causes and rates of attrition in both the Island and Mainland varieties of Judeo-Spanish.

References

Andersen, Roger W. (1982) "Determining the linguistic attributes of language attrition" in Barbara F. Freed and Richard Lambert (eds.) The Loss of Language Skills. Rowley: Newbury House.

Benbassa, Ester and Aron Rodrigue (2000) Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Campbell, Lyle and Martha C. Muntzel (1989) "The structural consequences of language death" in Nancy C. Dorian (ed.) Investigating Obsolescence: Studies in Language Contraction and Death. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Corbett, Greville G. (1991) Gender. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dorian, Nancy C. (1973) "Grammatical change in a dying dialect." Language 49; pp. 413-438.

_____(1978) "The fate of morphological complexity in language death: evidence from East Sutherland Gaelic." Language 54; pp. 590-609.

_____ . (1981) Language Death: The Life Cycle of a Scottish Gaelic Dialect. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Güleryüz, Naim (1992) İstanbul Sinagogları. Istanbul: Rekor.

Harris, Tracy K. (1979) The Prognosis for Judeo-Spanish: Its Description, Present Status, Survival and Decline, with implications for the study of language death in general. Ph.D. Dissertation: Georgetown University.

Janse, Mark (2003). "Language death and language maintenance" in Janse, M. and S. Tol (eds.) Language Death and Language Maintenance: Theoretical, practical and descriptive approaches. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Lipski, John M. (1993). "Creoloid phenomena in the Spanish of transitional bilinguals." In John Lipski and Ana Roca (eds.) Spanish in the United States: Linguistic Contact and Diversity. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Pavlenko, Aneta (2004) "L2 influence and L1 attrition in adult bilingualism" in Monika Schmid, Barbara Köpke, Merel Keijzer, Lina Weilemar (eds.) First Language Attrition: Interdisciplinary perspectives on methodological issues. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Sachar, Howard (1994) Farewell España: The World of the Sephardim Remembered. New York: Vintage.

Schmidt, Annette (1985) Young People's Dyirbal: An Example of Language Death from Australia. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thomason, Sarah Grey and Terrence Kaufman (1988) Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics Berkeley: University of California Press.

Selected Proceedings of the 5th Workshop on Spanish Sociolinguistics

edited by Jim Michnowicz and Robin Dodsworth

Ordering information

Orders for the library binding edition are handled by Cascadilla Press.
To place an order, go to www.lingref.com or contact:

Cascadilla Press, P.O. Box 440355, Somerville, MA 02144, USA
phone: 1-617-776-2370, fax: 1-617-776-2271, sales@cascadilla.com

Web access and citation information

This entire proceedings can also be viewed on the web at www.lingref.com. Each paper has a unique document # which can be added to citations to facilitate access. The document # should not replace the full citation.

This paper can be cited as:

Romero, Rey. 2011. Mainland vs. Island: A Comparative Morphological Study on Spanish-Turkish Contact. In *Selected Proceedings of the 5th Workshop on Spanish Sociolinguistics*, ed. Jim Michnowicz and Robin Dodsworth, 50-56. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. www.lingref.com, document #2505.