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Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish as Determinants of Identity: As Illustrated in the Jewish Press of the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Abstract

The paper shows an image and functions of Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish languages among Jewish Diaspora groups – the Balkan Sephardim and the Ashkenazim (the Ostjuden group) – in the period from the beginning of the twentieth century until the outbreak of World War II. The study is based on the articles from Jewish weeklies, magazines and newspapers from pre-war Bosnia and Hercegovina and from Germany/Poland. It demonstrates a double-sided attitude towards the languages. On the one hand – an image of the languages as determinants of Jewish identity. Touching on this theme, the authors of the paper also try to highlight the images of Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish and as determinants in a narrower sense – of the Sephardi/Ashkenazi identity in that period. On the other hand, the paper shows a tendency to treat the languages as “corrupted” and “dying” languages, and as factors slowing down the assimilation of Jewish groups and also as an obstacle for Zionist ideologies.

Keywords: Yiddish language, Judeo-Spanish language, identity, Balkan Sephardim, Balkan Ashkenazim, Ostjuden group.

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One of the most important functions of language, apart from communication, is expression of identity within a specific social group (which is evident in sociolects, dialects and jargons) or an ethnic or national community (in this case the membership is evident in the fact that one speaks their own language, separate from the language of other national communities, and in the picture of the world which the language conjures up, the values it fulfils, preserves and passes on). Thus, language is the cultural cement and codifier, also in the conditions of national minorities, emigration or diaspora. Natan Birnbaum, a leading Jewish thinker, columnist, writer, publisher of many magazines, highlighted such a role of Jewish languages in the Jewish press published in German at the turn of the twentieth century:

Ueberall, wo ein Volk unter einem anderen zerstreut wird, assimiliert es sich diesem ganz, nimmt es dessen Sprache ganz an. Warum haben es gerade die Juden anders gemacht? Warum nahmen wohl auch sie die eine oder andere Sprache an, haben aber dann nicht geruht, ehe sie ihr ein jüdisches Gesicht gaben? Das kann doch nicht im Exil, muß vielmehr in der Lebenskraft unseres Volkes begründet sein¹ (Birnbaum, 1913a, p. 85).

This paper shows the status of Jewish languages of the Diaspora — Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish — as indicators of Jewish or solely of Sephardic or Ostjuden identity. More specifically, we will try to determine to what extent these languages played a role in such indication in the first half of the twentieth century. The sources which were used are Jewish magazines appearing in Berlin and Sarajevo.

¹ “Wherever a nation is dispersed among other nations, it fully assimilates into them and acquires their language. Why is it that the Jews acted differently? Why did they acquire other languages, but they did not give up until they gave them the Jewish character? It does not result from emigration only, but is related to our nation’s nature and life force.” (All translations ours – I.O., A.T.).

1. Ostjuden and their language

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Yiddish language was a medium of Eastern European Jews' culture and an indication of their identity. This analysis aims at a description of the Yiddish language as a determinant of the Eastern European Jews' identity in selected articles of the Jewish press published in German. The timeframe of this analysis encompasses historical, economic, cultural and social events which took place at the turn of the twentieth century in Europe: an influx to Germany (being often a transit country) of Jewish migrants from the East, fleeing pogroms, difficult economic situation or the outbreak of World War I.

The term “Ostjuden”

The ethnonym “Ostjuden” was coined by Natan Birnbaum to characterise the Eastern European Jews in the following way:

Die Juden des slavischen Osteuropa, einschließlich Rumäniens, haben sich zu einer eigenartigen jüdischen Gruppe herausgebildet, die nunmehr, infolge der großen Wanderungen der letzten Jahrzehnte [...] ihre größeren und kleineren Konzentrationen hat und acht bis neun Millionen zählt [...]. Für diese nicht hinwegzuleugnende, notorische Gruppeneinheit ist jetzt die Bezeichnung Ostjuden ziemlich allgemein in Gebrauch. Sie ist sicherlich nicht ideal und wird insbesondere durch die Wanderungen immer mehr desavouiert² (Acher, 1913a, pp. 315–316).

What was characteristic of the Eastern European Jews was the lack of assimilation into the culture of a given country, preserving separate religion, habits and traditions, as well as the fact that, as Birnbaum defines them: “Ostjuden sprechen Jiddisch”: the Ostjuden speak Yiddish and create cultural texts in the language, which means that Yiddish is not a dialect, jargon or gibberish, but a language considered in terms of culture and identity.

Overview of sources

The most important Jewish titles published in German at the turn of the twentieth century included, first and foremost, the magazine *Ost und West* – the illustrated monthly on contemporary Judaism, published in

² “The Jews of the Slavic Eastern Europe, including Romania, created a peculiar Jewish group which now, as a result of many migrations of the recent decades, [...] has its own smaller and bigger concentrations and numbers from eight to nine million people [...]. This unquestionable, fixed group used to be defined as *Ostjuden*. Naturally it is not perfect and as a result of migrations it becomes more and more degraded.”

Berlin between 1901 and 1923. According to its guidelines, the magazine documented the academic and cultural life of the European Jews, with special regard to Eastern European Jews' achievements. The monthly *Die Freistatt* aimed at uniting all Western European Jews and was considered a discussion forum for the issues related to the Jewish literature, history, philosophy, religion as well as politics and sociology. The magazine *Der Jude*, connected with cultural Zionism, published between 1916 and 1928, was also aimed at analysing the issues related to the Ashkenazic Jews' cultural and social situation, but its main purpose was to familiarise the reader with Eastern European Jews' culture and customs and to improve their negative image in the German Jews' perception. The weekly *Die Welt*, founded by Teodor Herzl and published between 1897 and 1914, focused on the issues connected with Zionism, anti-Semitism and the assimilation of the German Jews.

Evaluation

In the analysed corpus of texts, the Eastern European Jews' language represents the community of Ostjuden, in particular its nationality, identity, culture and religion. As Felix Perles states in an article from 1925:

Die Juden selbst bezeichneten ihre Sprache als „teutsch“ und nannten die jüdisch-deutsche Pentateuchübersetzung „teutsch-chummesch“, ja sie bildeten das Verbum „verteutschen“ im Sinne von „übersetzen“. Erst später unterschieden sie die Schriftsprache „iwri-teutsch“ d. i. hebräisch-deutsch, und die Umgangssprache mame-loschen d. i. Muttersprache [...]. Heute wird sie gewöhnlich kurzweg als „jiddisch“ bezeichnet³ (Perles, 1925, p. 378).

The names for Yiddish occurring in the analysed press texts can be categorised as follows:

- the terms carrying **positive** connotations: *Mame-loshn*,
- the terms carrying **neutral** connotations: *Yiddish, the mixed language, the language of commercial contacts, the language of the Jewish culture*,
- the terms carrying **negative** connotations: *a dialect, jargon, gibberish, a language of social lowlands*.

³ “The Jews themselves defined their language as ‘teutsch’ and they called the Jewish-German translation of the Pentateuch ‘teutsch-chumasch.’ They even created the verb ‘verteutschen,’ which meant ‘to translate.’ Only later did they differentiate between the language of texts ‘iwri-teutsch,’ i.e. Hebrew-German, and the colloquial language ‘Mame-loshn,’ i.e. ‘the mother tongue.’ Nowadays it is briefly called Yiddish.”

Mame-loshn

The group of language names inspiring positive connotations includes the term *Mame-loshn*, which in word-by-word translation into English means ‘mother language’ (Yiddish *mame* ‘mum’ and Hebrew *loshn* ‘language’). Yiddish, contrary to Hebrew, i.e. the language of the holy books, was everyday speech of Eastern European Jews, the speech related to a mother – a guardian of hearth and home. The connotations of family warmth and peace also find reflection in a warm and friendly attitude to the Yiddish language. The name *Mame-loshn* itself does not appear in the analysed texts but the description of Yiddish conversations actually indicates such a term:

Ich muß jedenfalls gestehen, daß ich dem jiddischen Geplauder von Frauen und Kindern oft genug in reinem Entzücken zugehört habe [...]. Es ist jedenfalls richtig, das Jiddische verleitet zu einer plauderhaften Geschwätzigkeit⁴ (Calvary, 1916, p. 26).

The wording “women and children talking” can be actually interpreted as a reference to *Mame-loshn*, whereas the word “chatter” carries somewhat negative connotations, firstly because it is colloquial and secondly because it refers to talking about trivial matters.

Yiddish

The glottonym “Yiddish” appears in the analysed texts only a few times. Both contempt of Yiddish and praising it for being the main foundation of Jewishness can be seen in the text titled *Unsere Stellung zum Jiddischen* [Our position concerning Yiddish] by Hugo Bergmann, a well-known Jewish philosopher and educator, published in the magazine *Die Welt* in 1914:

Diese Abneigung gegen das Jiddische ist nicht ganz unverständlich. Vielen mag es als typische Representant des Galuth erscheinen und sie bekämpfen Letzteres im Ersteren; vielfach aber ist der Anti-Jiddischismus eine Reaktion auf die maßlosen Uebertreibungen der Jiddischisten, die das jiddische Judentum mit dem Judentum schlechthin identifizieren, die unsere Vergangenheit negieren und, als wären wir das jüngste Volk der Weltgeschichte, uns mit unserer Kulturarbeit von vorn beginnen lassen möchten [...]. Der Ostjude braucht nur zu leben und er lebt jüdisch. Diese Selbstverständlichkeit des Jüdischseins verdankt er vor allem der jiddischen Sprache⁵ (Bergmann, 1914, pp. 177–178).

⁴ “Anyway I must confess that I listened in enchantment to women and children talking in the Yiddish language [...]. Yes, that is true, Yiddish favours a friendly chatter.”

⁵ “The dislike for the Yiddish language is not completely incomprehensible. Many people think that it is representative of the Jewish exile and that is why in fighting the language they stand against the exile. Frequently, however, anti-Yiddishism is a reaction to overly exaggerated activity on the part of Yiddishists, who identify Yiddish Judaism with all Jewishness. This

Mixed language

In general linguistics, a “mixed language” is a language created as a result of mutual borrowings from two or more different languages as a consequence of long-lasting and close contacts of ethnic groups (cf. Polański, 2003, p. 271).

Birnbaum, among others, explains the character of Yiddish as a mixed language, deciding that it is caused by the Jews’ alienation and migrations, which makes it an untypical language of the Jewish civilisation and proves the civilization’s faithfulness to its tradition.

Man erklärt die Mischsprachen gewöhnlich mit dem Exile. Das Exil habe sie hervorgerufen. Aber hörten wir denn nicht eben, daß die Juden schon in Palästina eine Mischsprache schufen? [...] Wir brauchen uns also unserer Mischsprachen nicht zu schämen. Sie sind die Zeugen unserer Kraft [...]. Sie sind der deutlichste und klarste Beweis unserer ewigen Erneuerung, – der großartigen Treue unseres Volkes gegen sich selbst⁶ (Birnbaum, 1913a, pp. 85–86).

The articles concerning the language have mainly an informative and academic character and in most cases explain the mixed character of the Yiddish language in the following way:

Das Jüdische ist wohl aus mehreren Sprachen entstanden [...]. Der größte Teil der Wörter stammt aus dem Deutschen und die Flexion ist deutsch: fast alle übrigen Vokabeln, namentlich fast alle Bezeichnungen für die Begriffe des höheren geistigen Lebens, sind hebräisch, auch der Satzbau ist zum Teil hebräisch; schliesslich nehmen nehmen slavische, romanische und anderssprachige Wörter und Eigentümlichkeiten einen beträchtlichen Raum ein. Doch alle diese Flüsse und Bäche, die aus verschiedenen Weltgegenden herniederfließen, vereinigen sich zu einem mächtigen einheitlichen Strom⁷ (Acher, 1902, p. 458).

negates our past as if we were a young nation and as if we were just starting the history of our existence [...]. However, an Ostjude needs only to live so as to live a Jewish life, and this self-evidence of being a Jew they owe mainly to Yiddish”

⁶ “A mixed character of a language is usually attributed to exile of a people. But did we not hear recently that the Jews had already created a mixed language in Palestine? [...] Thus, we should not feel ashamed of our mixed languages. They are witnesses to our strength [...] and the clearest, most evident proof of our people’s lack of assimilation and faithfulness to their tradition.”

⁷ “Yiddish was created from many languages. Most words originate from German, and likewise German is the inflection. Almost all other words, i.e. all terms for the spiritual sphere, are Hebrew, and the syntax is also partly Hebrew. The rest is Slavic and Romanesque words, and words from other languages. All the rivers and streams, however, which flow down from all ends of the earth, merge into a powerful, uniform current.”

Calvary argues against defining Yiddish as a mixed language: in his view, Yiddish is no longer a variety of German as it has its own literature, and poets who created “a Yiddish style” from colloquial German.

Wenn Birnbaum behauptet, daß das Jiddische, aus Mittelhochdeutsch, Hebräisch-Aramäisch und Slavisch entstanden, eine Mischsprache sei wie das Englische, so muß dieser Auffassung durchaus widersprochen werden. Will man die Zugehörigkeit einer Sprache nach ihrem Wortschatz und dem Hauptgerippe ihrer Syntax beurteilen, so ist das Jiddische eine deutsche Sprache. Aber eben sobald ein Volk Literatur schafft, so lautet die Fragestellung: kann der Dichter die Sprache des Lebens selbst, wie sie im Munde des Volkes lebt, zur Kunstform steigern? [...] Die [jiddischen] Dichter haben in Vers und Prosa aus den Elementen der Umgangssprache etwas geschaffen, was eben nicht mehr Umgangssprache ist, sondern Stil. Jiddischer Stil aber, das heißt Selbständigkeit des Jiddischen. Nicht Mundart, sondern Sprache⁸ (Calvary, 1916, p. 32).

Language of commercial contacts

In linguistics, languages of economy and commerce are usually included in the group of languages for special purposes, i.e. languages saturated with professional terms, including the vocabulary whose usage range is limited to certain professional groups.

If we consider the description of the Yiddish language in the analysed texts, while it is not characterised as a language for special purposes, its role in commerce is nevertheless highlighted. For example, Rubstein, in the article titled *Die jüdische Sprache und der jüdische Handel* [Jewish language and commerce], published in the magazine *Freistatt* in 1913, demonstrates that there is an interdependence between a commercial success and the command of the Yiddish language. In his opinion, a Jew who speaks Yiddish has contact with the whole world. Economically speaking, a command of Yiddish is not only useful in international commerce. Its value is also proven in the internal commerce of the countries inhabited by many Jews (cf. Rubstein, 1913, p. 523).

According to the author, “the attitude towards the hated jargon” will change in the near future when the Jewish commercial bourgeoisie realises the great value it has in trade.

⁸ “If Birnbaum claims that Yiddish is, like English, a mixed language, which was created on the basis of Middle High German, Hebrew-Aramaic and Slavic, one should oppose this view. If we wanted to evaluate the membership of languages according to vocabulary and partly to syntax, Yiddish is a German language. But as a nation creates literature, we should ask if a poet is able to transform a language in such a way that a colloquial language becomes art? [...] Yiddish poets achieved this – elements of the colloquial language were used to create an actual Yiddish style. A style means the independence of Yiddish. No longer a local dialect but a language.”

The language of the Jewish culture

In the press published in German, Yiddish is also sometimes described as the language of the Jewish culture. Indeed, Yiddish was more than a mere tool of communication. It was the language in which a national literature was created, it was a language of the press, commentary, propaganda and political debate. This was also proven by the previously mentioned titles of press articles: *Die ostjuedische Presse* [Ostjuden press] (Lin, 1907), *Die hebraeische und jargonische Presse im Jahre 1908* [Hebrew and jargon press in 1908] (Lin, 1909) or press titles including the term “jargon”: *Die Jargonliteratur* [Jargon literature] (Eliaschoff, 1908), *Moderne Jargonlyrik* [Contemporary jargon lyric poetry] (Meisels, 1907). In a series of articles titled *Noch einmal Ost- und Westjudentum* [Once again about the issue of Eastern and Western European Jews] (Archer, 1913a, 1913, 1914a, 1914b), Acher confirms the “cultural” status of the Yiddish language:

Jiddisch hat die jüdische Sage und Legende in sich eingeatmet, und nun gibt es keine andere Zunge, die sie mit demselben spezifischen Zauber von Heimlichkeit der Seele des heutigen Ostjuden wieder mitteilen könnte [...]. Jiddisch ist die Sprache jüdischer Dichter geworden [...]. Jiddisch beherrscht die Tribüne, Jiddisch die Zeitung. Jiddisch hat das jüdische Theater ermöglicht [...] ⁹ (Acher, 1913a, p. 319).

Dialect

A dialect, in its turn, including the special case that is a cultural dialect,¹⁰ is defined in general linguistics as a variety of a general national language, distinguished by certain phonetic and lexical – less frequently morphological and syntactic – features, used in a specific territory and by a specific social class (e.g. by peasants); furthermore, dialects illustrate the changes undergone by a language at different stages of its development (cf. Polański, 2003, p. 118). Labelling an ethnic language as a dialect depreciates its value, so the name “dialect” has been categorised here as carrying negative connotations.

⁹ “Yiddish absorbed Jewish legends and there is no other language these days which would tell about the mystery of the Jewish soul with the same peculiar charm [...]. Yiddish became the language of young poets [...]. Yiddish rules the tribune, Yiddish rules the newspaper. Yiddish made possible the Jewish theatre [...].”

¹⁰ According to an encyclopedia of general linguistics (Polański, 2003, p. 118), a cultural dialect is a language of educated classes, which is used as a basis for the codification of a literary language of a given nation or one which evidently keeps interacting with a literary language. Within one ethnic language, depending on historical and social factors, we can distinguish different numbers of cultural dialects. Only a cultural dialect of an ethnic language can be called a general or general national language. The examples of ethnic languages with a few cultural dialects are English and German (different cultural dialects in different territories, especially in different states).

Das Jiddische, hören wir, sei keine gebildete, nationale Sprache, es wird ein deutscher Dialekt genannt und mit dem Mecklenburgischen auf eine Stufe gestellt. Keine gebildete Sprache. Sie sei erstens unschön, und dann, das hören wir auch von Hebraisten, sei es unmöglich, sich in ihr wissenschaftlich auszudrücken¹¹ (Calvary, 1916, p. 26).

After World War I, Yiddish came to be called “a Jewish-German dialect”:

Das Deutsche [ist] von Juden gesprochen worden, und zwar sind es die verschiedenen Dialekte des Mittelhochdeutschen, denen wir seit dem 11. Jahrhundert bei ihnen begegnen [...]. Erst nach der Auswanderung aus Deutschland entwickelte sich bei den Juden in Polen ein eigener Dialekt, der als Jüdisch-Deutsch bezeichnet werden kann¹² (Perles, 1925, p. 373).

The *Jüdisch-Deutsch*, i.e. Jewish-German, dialect is thus the mother tongue of the Jews from the area of western Russia, Galicia and Romania, and consists of two different subdialects: the Northern, Lithuanian, and the Southern, Polish (spoken also in Ukraine, Hungary, Romania). The author of the text thinks that it is wrong to define the Jewish-German dialect as a jargon, since this term is understood to mean an artificially created language of a specific social class. The language of the community of millions, however, which was created by mixing of a base language with two other languages, is hardly a “jargon.”

Nevertheless, it was actually the latter term that was most frequently used to identify the Jewish language.

Jargon

Linguistically speaking, the term “jargon” denotes an environmental variety of a national language created by some (usually closed) social group, but not a territorial one. These groups are usually regarded as lower in cultural terms, which gives the term jargon a negative emotional connotation. A jargon is also characterised by unique vocabulary and is different, especially when it comes to the lexicon, from a general language (a cultural dialect), used by an entire community. The term “jargon” was also used in the past to define varieties of language which included elements incomprehensible to an average user, words and expressions marked expressively which were not

¹¹ “Yiddish, we hear, is not a language of culture or a national language. It is sometimes called a German dialect and is likened to the Mecklenburg dialect. This language is plain and, as we hear the Hebraists say, cannot be used it to discuss scientific issues.”

¹² “The German language, actually different dialects of the Middle High German language, appeared in the Jewish speech from the eleventh century [...]. It was not until they emigrated from Germany that their own Jewish dialect was created in the area of Poland, the one which can be defined as Jewish-German.”

commonly used or understood (cf. Markowski, 2006, p. 334; Polański, 2003, p. 708). It was used then in the context of a secret language or a language of the mob (e.g. thieves' jargon, hooligans' jargon).

A Judaic dictionary published in Berlin in 1927 includes a definition of a jargon by (Salomon) Birnbaum illustrating it as "a disrespectful term for Yiddish introduced by the Maskilim" (Herlitz & Kirchner, 1929, p. 158). Also according to Nathan Birnbaum, it is the Haskalah, or the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jewish enlightenment movement, that contributed to attaching to Yiddish the negative connotation of a jargon:

Hatte ja schon Moses Mendelsohn im Jahre 1773 den jüdischen „Jargon“ als so etwas wie ein Werk des Bösen angegriffen, das das jüdische Volk korrumpieren helfe. Und hat doch noch der bekannte Geschichtsschreiber Graetz das Jüdische als eine „halbtierische“ Sprache bezeichnet¹³ (Birnbaum, 1913a, p. 84).

Thus, the term "jargon" undeniably carries negative connotations in the context of the Yiddish language. In the analysed press texts it appears quite often, e.g. in titles like: *Die Jargonliteratur* [Jargon Literature] (Eliaschoff, 1908), *Moderne Jargonlyrik* [Contemporary Jargon Lyric Poetry] (Meisels, 1907) or *Aus der „Jargon“-Welt* [From the World of "Jargon"] (Mirjam, 1904).

Cultural Zionists, i.e. the supporters of reviving the Jewish spirit, and of moral reconstruction and the rebirth of culture in the assimilated areas decisively rejected using the word "jargon" with reference to Yiddish, stating that the term referred to sociolects, i.e. languages of social groups:

Wie ich schon oft betonte, kann „Jargon“ nur eine Summe von Aenderungen genannt werden, die irgend eine Klasse des Volkes innerhalb ihres Lebenskreises in der des Volkes hervorruft. Es gibt einen Jargon der Studenten, Matrosen, Diebe usw. Niemals aber darf man die Sprache einer ethnischen Gruppe, die Sprache eines Volkes oder Volksteiles mit seinen verschiedenen Klassen, – und mag sie auch noch so gemischt sein, – „Jargon“ nennen. Man hat dies auch niemals früher getan, weder in Hinsicht auf die großen Mischsprachen nichtjüdischer Völker, wie z.B. Französisch und Englisch, noch hinsichtlich der jüdischen Mischsprachen¹⁴ (Birnbaum, 1913a, p. 84).

All in all, these and other conclusions regarding the term "jargon" as applied to Yiddish in the analysed press articles can be summarised as follows:

¹³ "It was Moses Mendelsohn who in 1773 criticised the Jewish jargon as a work of evil which helped corrupt the Jewish nation and the well-known historian Graetz had called the Jewish language 'a partly animal' language."

¹⁴ "As I have often emphasised, 'jargon' can only show all the changes which appeared within a specified social class of a given nation. There is a jargon of students, sailors, thieves, etc. However, we should never call a jargon a language of an ethnic group or a language of a nation having social classes, even if it is a mixed language. This was never done previously, either in the case of great mixed languages of non-Jewish nations, like French and English, or in the case of mixed Jewish languages."

- the Jewish-German jargon is not gibberish or a local dialect,
- it is a language of the Jewish nation and has its own history and development, it is also a vivid language of a great Jewish community,
- the Jewish jargon is the German language of the past centuries which developed under the influence of the Jewish community.

Also expressed about the “German-Jewish jargon” were the views that it was:

- the jargon of Polish Russian Jews, i.e. a peculiar mixture of elements of Old Hebrew, German, Latin, French and Slavic languages, mainly Polish and Russian,
- at first glance a barbarous language, which was mistakenly treated as the synonym of Polish Jewish merchants’ language,
- wrongly considered a language of Jewish vagrants.

Gibberish

The word “gibberish” originates from colloquial language and means a conversation in a language one does not know or does not like; the term is also used to denote incomprehensible, unpleasantly sounding speech. Describing the history of their own nation in the press, Jews highlighted their conviction of being a part of the German cultural sphere:

Die deutsche Kultur ist kein einheitliches Gebilde. Die verschiedenen Rassen und Religionsgemeinschaften haben zu ihr beigetragen. Germanen und Slaven nebst Einschlügen anderer Stämme in innigem Gemisch, Protestanten, Katholiken und Juden arbeiten auf deutschem Boden an dem großen Werk. [...] Zu den Trägern deutscher Kultur gehören auch die Juden¹⁵ (Goldmann, 1917, p. 164).

The press texts outlined the image of a “typical/real” Western European Jew, who was a German and whose first culture was the German culture. Simultaneously, however, a picture of the Ostjuden is painted, who evade full assimilation: foreign, gibbering, incomprehensible, different – and whose culture also casts a shadow on the assimilated German Jews.

Language of social lowlands

Finally, Yiddish was at times defined as a language of social lowlands. This characterisation was explicitly and unequivocally negative: “Jüdisch sei nur eine Sprache für Pöbel-Bedürfnisse, sagen sie [Intelligenzler], eine

¹⁵ “The German culture is not a homogenous creation. Different races and religious communities have contributed to it. Germanic and Slavic peoples as well as other tribes. Protestants, Catholics and Jews have laboured together on the German soil to create this great work. [...] Each of these groups contributes to the German culture and the Jews are one of them.”

niedrige Sprache ohne Schönheit und Feinheit, ohne eine Spur von Adel¹⁶ (Birnbäum, 1913b, p. 139), or:

Soll man den Zionisten der äußersten Linken oder Rechten [...] Glauben schenken, so ist das Jüdische ein garstiger Jargon, ein widerwärtiges Gemengsel der verschiedenartigsten Sprachbrocken, ein getreues Abbild der „Golus“-Schande, eine Sprache ohne nationale Würde, ohne nationale Zukunft, ein trauriger Notbehelf¹⁷ (Acher, 1902, p. 457).

Conclusions

The prestige of a language is usually related to its social status, and the prestige attributed to each language by the national community is an important factor involved in introducing change to a group's language in the case of its social advancement. This is why some members of the German Jewish community treated Yiddish, the language of the less affluent and prominent, disrespectfully. By contrast, linguistic loyalty,¹⁸ which is a significant element of most revival movements, makes a language a means in the fight for maintaining one's own identity. The image of the Yiddish language in the Jewish press published in German illustrates the influence of both these social factors:

- the low prestige of the language is connected with a disrespectful attitude towards Yiddish which originated from the Ostjuden's bad economic situation and the conviction that it was a language of simple and uneducated people. Such attitude is exemplified by the following wordings: *a jargon, gibberish, a language of social lowlands*;
- linguistic loyalty is, in turn, attested to by such descriptions as: *a mixed language, a dialect, the language of economy and trade, the language of the Jewish culture*.

The images of Yiddish created in the analysed texts from the Jewish press are in most cases only seemingly stereotypical because they do not fully meet a defining feature of a stereotype, namely the division of a group into *ours* and *foreign*. The press discourse does, on the other hand, prove the ambiguity of Western European Jews in perceiving the Eastern European Jewish culture.

¹⁶ "The Jewish language is only a language created for plebeian purposes, they [the intellectuals] claim, it is a language of lower social classes, without beauty and refinement, without a trace of nobleness."

¹⁷ "If we are to believe the Zionists, leftists or rightists, [...] Yiddish is a disgusting jargon, a detestable mixture of diverse vocabulary, a true reflection of the disgrace of the Exile, a language without national pride, without national future, a pathetic substitute of a language."

¹⁸ Linguistic loyalty is understood as attachment to one's own native language which is usually connected with a feeling of national awareness.

2. Bosnian-Sephardic Jews and their language

The term Sephardic Jews

The name *Sefarad*, *Sfarad* (Hebrew ספֿרד), which occurs in the biblical Book of Obadiah, is probably associated with the capital of the ancient Kingdom of Lydia, the city of Sardes (Sardis), situated in what is today the west of Turkey (Malka, 2002, p. 3). Both *Targum Jonathan* (the translation of the biblical books of the prophets into Aramaic) and the *Talmud* associate the proper name *Sefarad* with *Ispamia* ‘the land at the end of the world,’ i.e. the Iberian Peninsula, whereas the Syriac translation of the Bible called *Peshitta* associates it with *Hispania*, a Roman province covering present-day Spain and Portugal (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1996, p. 1164; Malka, 2002, p. 3). From the eighth century AD the Hebrew *Sefarad* has meant ‘Spain’ or ‘the Iberian Peninsula’ as a whole (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1996, p. 1164; Díaz-Mas, 1997, p. 23). It is also the term from which the names of one of the factions of the Jewish peoples originate: *Sefardim* — the Sephardic Jews/the Sephardim.’

There are various views as to exactly which faction of the Jewish people can be defined as the Sephardic Jews. Although the name suggests the Jews related to the Iberian Peninsula, the name Sephardic Jews is sometimes used to define all Jews of the origin and religion different from Ashkenazic (Malka, 2002, p. 4; Ben Cvi, 1936, p. 3), i.e. from the Jews from the Central, Eastern and partly Western Europe speaking Yiddish (Hebrew – אשכנזים ‘the Ashkenazic Jews/the Ashkenazim’). In present-day Israel, the term *Sephardic Jews* not only denotes descendants of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, but also, and perhaps mainly, the Jews from Arabic countries or all countries of the Orient, including the Jews whose ancestors never inhabited Spain or Portugal. According to the American Sephardic Federation, the discussed group includes, apart from the Jews of Iberian origin, also the Jews “whose home countries are Syria, Morocco, Yemen, Iraq, Turkey, Greece and Iran” (Malka, 2002, p. 4).

Finally, the name “Sephardic Jews” is sometimes used only for the Jews who come from the Iberian Peninsula. This theory, however, comes with different opinions: some academics think that *Sefardim* denotes the Jews living on the Iberian Peninsula from the Roman times until the fifteenth century (i.e. until the decree on the exile of Jews was announced) and their descendants settled in new homelands (Vidaković-Petrov, 1986) – including the areas of the former Ottoman Empire, Italy, the Netherlands and England. Paul Johnson (1993, p. 245) thinks that the Sephardic Jews first emerged in the fourteenth century, which he considers the time when the Sephardic

diaspora began. Then, as a result of persecution and pogroms in many towns of Christian Spain, mass emigration started, for example to North Africa.

Mostly, however, it is thought that we can start talking about the Sephardic diaspora from the end of the fifteenth century, when after the decrees on the expulsion of Jews had been issued in Spain in 1492 and in Portugal in 1496, the refugees began to settle in areas of the Ottoman Empire, Italia and North Africa. Also included in the Sephardic group are often the refugees of the second wave of emigration, which started in the sixteenth century, who settled in the Netherlands, France and England. They were mainly Portuguese Marranos, i.e. Jews who, voluntarily or not, started to profess Christianity, but were later forced to leave nonetheless (Edwards, 2002, p. 99).

Sometimes it is highlighted that the term Sephardic Jews cannot denote the Jewish inhabitants of Spain and Portugal but only descendants of exiles and emigrants from the Iberian Peninsula, i.e. those who have never lived in this area (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1996, p. 1164; Malka, 2002, p. 3). This is connected with the fact that this term encompasses some sociocultural features characteristic solely of the people already inhabiting new homelands (the Judeo-Spanish language, tradition and specific culture).

Such a definition of the term *Sefardim* is partly accepted by Paloma Díaz-Mas (1997, pp. 24–25), among others. She enumerates, however, additional conditions and features which further narrow its meaning. Above all, she regards the Sephardic Jews as the descendants of the Jews banished from the Iberian Peninsula in the late fifteenth century or the Jews assimilated into them in cultural terms. Furthermore, in her view, the term “Sephardic Jews” should not be also used for the Jews living on the Iberian Peninsula before the banishment as well as for the first generation of exiles – she suggests calling them *Spanish Jews*, as they were not marked by sociological and cultural features characteristic of the Sephardic Jews, who lived in complete isolation from the Iberian Peninsula afterwards. Judeo-Spanish is one of these features which Díaz-Mas considers nearly as important as the Iberian origin. This is the reason why she thinks that the Jews inhabiting, for example, the area of the former Ottoman Empire or Morocco who used the Judeo-Spanish language until the twentieth century are more typical Sephardic Jews than those who were present in France, the Netherlands and England, as the latter assimilated faster into the rest of society and stopped using Judeo-Spanish sooner.

Thus, the Sephardic Jews of the Balkans and Bosnia are first and foremost the descendants of Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. As we have already mentioned, according to Díaz-Mas *Sefardim* were also the Jews who fully assimilated into the Jews coming from the Peninsula in linguistic and sociocultural terms. One such group in the Balkans were the so-called

Romaniots. This term refers to the Jews settled within the territory of the former Byzantine Empire, as well as in the Balkans and in Asia Minor since the ancient times.

Overview of sources

The written sources which were used for this part of the analysis were selected articles from Jewish weeklies appearing in Sarajevo (and read in entire Bosnia and Herzegovina): *Židovska svijest* [Jewish Awareness] appearing between 1918–1924, *Narodna židovska svijest* [National Jewish Awareness] – 1924–1927, *Jevrejski život* [Jewish Life] – 1924–1927 and *Jevrejski glas* [Jewish Voice] – 1928–1941. The first two of the weeklies had a Zionist profile. *Jevrejski život*, on the other hand, was a body of the Sephardic movement in Bosnia (the movement which promoted, inter alia, the cultivation of the Sephardic Jews’ tradition and language). *Jevrejski glas* was supposed to be a body which would reconcile the profiles of both factions – Zionist and pro-Sephardic. The language of the weeklies *Židovska svijest* and *Narodna židovska svijest* was Serbo-Croatian, whereas *Jevrejski život* and *Jevrejski glas* were bilingual (their articles were printed in Serbo-Croatian and Judeo-Spanish). The linguistic policy of the magazines shows to some extent the sociolinguistic situation in the Bosnian Sephardic community: the years 1918–1941 are the period during which Bosnia was the part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the later Kingdom of Yugoslavia) and all the Jews were rightful citizens. It is a period of the assimilation of most Sephardic Jews, their participation in public life and, in linguistic terms, a period of bilingualism during which the “national” Serbo-Croatian language was acquired.

Evaluation

The Sephardic Jews’ maternal language is given different names in the analysed press titles: *lingva žudia* (Judeo-Spanish for ‘Jewish language’), *lingua žudia-spaniol* (Judeo-Spanish for ‘Judeo-Spanish language’), *lingua espanjola* (Judeo-Spanish for ‘Spanish language’), *judío-español* (Spanish for ‘Judeo-Spanish’), *španjolski jezik* (Serbo-Croatian¹⁹ for ‘Spanish language’), *španjolski žargon* (Serbo-Croatian for ‘Spanish jargon’), *jevrejsko-španjolski* (Serbo-Croatian for ‘Judeo-Spanish’), *sefardski idiom* (Serbo-Croatian for ‘Sephardic idiom’), *jevrejsko-španski idiom* (Serbo-Croatian for ‘Judeo-Spanish idiom’).²⁰ The sources most often define

¹⁹ We use the term “the Serbo-Croatian language” since the analysis concerns the first half of the twentieth century, when there was no division into Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian.

²⁰ It is worth noting that these names do not include the most popular name of the language

the Sephardic Jews' speech as "language" but the terms "idiom" and "jargon" are also used. We should also note that, as indicated by their usage (and unlike with Yiddish), the terms "jargon" and "idiom" do not seem to have any negative connotations. What is significant in the analysis of how Judeo-Spanish is evaluated in selected texts is the discourse concerning the status of the language in that period, a status which is described variously – from the idealised language uniting the Sephardic community and the language of communication to the fading language which does not play an important role in the Balkans of the period.

Idealised language

The selected sources include descriptions of the language which definitely idealise its origin, function and even the way it sounds. Sentimental perception of the language can be observed among the very group of Bosnian Sephardic Jews and, a fact worth highlighting, descriptions of this type in the magazines are actually published in Judeo-Spanish:

[...] la konferensia del dr. Kalmi Baruh fue no solo un dokumento de una kultura bien eskožida i fina, sino una prova de la fuersa de i ermuzura de nuestro lenguaže. Sinjor Baruh [...] tiene el talento i la bravura de refraguar este lenguaže nuestro [...] ke nos deša enkantados koando lo ojimos de sus lavjos i konstatamos ke es tan beljo, ermozo i tiene una muzika [...] ²¹ ("Una nočada literaria," 1925, p. 2).

It is highlighted that Judeo-Spanish plays the role of a language of tradition, family life and a factor uniting the closest community: "El espanjol de muestra madre, muestro kortižo, de muestra mahale [...]" ²² ("Una nočada literaria," 1925, p. 2), at the same time, attention is drawn to the fact that it is useful as a language of communication in contemporary times: "žudio espanjol moderno, riko, elastiko, kapače" ²³ ("Una nočada literaria," 1925, p. 2), "[...] lingva žudia de novideades, lingva akomodada i rika, tiene ninansas i dialektos [...]" ²⁴ (Attijas, 1927, p. 3).

Idealised, sentimental perception of the language also appears in comments made outside the Bosnian Sephardic community. The same

– *ladino*. It was characteristic of the Balkan Sephardic Jews that they did not call their spoken language this way before World War II.

²¹ "[...] dr Kalmi Baruh's conference constituted not only proof of a well-preserved and sophisticated culture, but also a sample of the strength and beauty of our language. Mr Baruh [...] has a talent and courage to reconstruct our language [...] in such a way that we are delighted when we hear it out of Baruh's mouth and we decide that the language is beautiful, wonderful and melodic [...]"

²² "The Spanish language of our mother, our backyard, our mahala [...]"

²³ "Contemporary Judeo-Spanish, rich, flexible, voluminous."

²⁴ "[...] the Jewish language with innovations, the adapted and rich language, with nuances and dialects [...]"

tone is set in the article reprinted from the magazine *La Vara*. Its Jewish author from New York is sorry to note that the American Sephardic Jews lose their identity assimilating into the Ashkenazic Jews or disposing of their tradition, which results from, among other reasons, the loss of contact with the Spanish language (as he calls it). This is why the Balkan Sephardic Jews face a responsible task: they have to preserve as long as possible this language of tradition, of cultural heritage, the language differentiating the Sephardic Jews from other groups of the Diaspora, and even pursue its revival, which will enable the Sephardic Jews from other parts of the world to stay in touch with their ancestors' culture (Bito, 1939, p. 5).

National language – the differentiating factor, the integrating factor

The descriptions of the Sephardic Jews' language often emphasised its function as a national language (Judeo-Spanish *lingua nasionala*), first and foremost among the Jews from areas of the Ottoman Empire. In these areas it acquired the former role of Hebrew (it was called *segundo hebreo* – Judeo-Spanish for 'the second Hebrew'), integrating all Sephardic communities in the region and at the same time differentiating them from other groups of the Diaspora, e.g. "nuestros ermanos Aškenazim en la Polonia"²⁵ ("A las comunidades sefardis en nuestros paizes!", 1927, p. 2). It also differentiated the Balkan Sephardic Jews from those who settled in Western Europe (the Netherlands, France) and underwent fast assimilation, acquiring the languages of their environment, and as a result: "[...] se ništa ne razlikuju od drugih jevrejskih asimilanta u tim zemljama. S velikom masom Sefarada na Balkanu, u maloj Aziji i severnoj Africi nisu imali i nemaju skoro nikakvih veza"²⁶ (Romano, 1931, p. 5). Preserving the Judeo-Spanish language, described as a component of tradition, culture, mentality, spiritual life and even the Sephardic ideology, was supposed to be essential to sustaining a vivid Sephardic community which shared a common past and common features.

The sources also highlight the fact that in the Balkans the *španjolski* language was not only a bastion of culture, but it had also integrated the Sephardic Jews by means of its communicative function for a few hundred years. As only the Jews used it in the area of the Empire, it played a role of an indicator of not only Sephardic but also Sephardic-Jewish, and even simply Jewish identity, which is why in the Balkans it was commonly thought that a Jew was a user of "Spanish" (M. Levi, 1923, p. 2).

²⁵ "Our Ashkenazi brothers in Poland."

²⁶ "[...] are not in any way different from other Jews assimilated in these countries. They had and have hardly any ties with a great mass of the Sephardic Jews in the Balkans, Asia Minor and North Africa."

Language of the family circle

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the discourse concerning the language of Balkan Sephardic Jews very often described Judeo-Spanish as the language of the family circle (E. Levi, 1927c, p. 2). This term is associated with two features of the language: during that period it mostly functioned as the language of the closest environment (a home, neighbourhood, district) and was also the first language of its users. That is why in this context there appear the terms and statements like *maternji jezik* ('mother tongue') (E. Levi, 1927c, p. 2), *de muestra madre* ('our mother's [language]') ("Una noçada literaria," 1925, p. 2) or "smo čuli taj jezik još od naše koljevke" ("we heard this language from the cradle") (Bito, 1939, p. 5).

This status of the language does not seem to be questioned in the whole discussion, it was also sometimes pointed out that it still played this role for a great portion of Balkan Sephardic Jews.

Language of inner group communication

Some of the sources emphasised that the language of the Sephardim was not only the medium of the Sephardic identity or Jewishness as such, the medium of tradition and culture, but it still played an entirely practical part as a language of everyday (inner) communication, which draws our attention to the fact that the command of the language of the environment (Serbo-Croatian) was not yet common in some Sephardic communities. Being of a similar opinion, the editorial staff of the weekly *Jevrejski život* published a statement in one of the issues saying that they would print many articles in *espanjol*, since there are still many readers in Bosnia and in Southern Serbia, "ke konosen espanjol i solo poko serbo-kroato"²⁷ ("Muestras publikasjones en espanjol," 1924, p. 2).

It should be mentioned that not all journalists agreed with defining Judeo-Spanish as a language of full-fledged communication (which will be discussed below) and if they discerned any communicative function in this language, they highlighted that it was a strictly communicative function and the language was devoid of traits of a medium for a Jewish national identity ("Sefardski Jevreji i španjolski jezik," 1927, p. 2).

Competing language which needs to be cultivated

At the same time, even the supporters of the Sephardic movement recognised that in the 1920s the Judeo-Spanish language in the Balkans started to compete, on the one hand, with the languages of the local milieu

²⁷ "[w]ho know *espanjol* and only to a limited extent Serbo-Croatian."

(Serbo-Croatian and others) and, on the other hand, with the increasingly promoted Hebrew language (in relation to Zionist trends). The Conference of Sephardic Youth, organised in 1927, focused, among other things, on both these issues. Eliezer Levi, one of the editors of Sephardic press in Bosnia, summarises them as follows:

Kadgod je govor o jevr.-španj. jeziku, mehanički se nameće pitanje hebrejskog jezika. [...] jedni su bili mišljenja, da svim silama moramo nastojati oko učenja hebr. jezika, a španjolski jezik treba ostaviti da tinja, dok sasvim ne utrne. Drugi su bili mišljenja, da španjolski jezik ne smijemo i ne možemo ostaviti da propadne, jer je on tokom vjekova postao nacionalnim jezikom Sefardstva (E. Levi, 1927a, p. 1).

Ako mi, naime, izgubivši španjolski poprimimo jezik okoline – u našem slučaju srpsko-hrvatski – a drugačije ne može da bude, onda stvar sa hebrejskom postaje mnogo teža i komplikovanija. Nastaje dakle pitanje: ima li mogućnosti da hebrejski postane jezikom naše jevrejske zajednice i uopće jezikom jevrejskih grupa u galutu? [...] da hebr. jezik postane vladajućim jezikom čitave jedne etničke zajednice mora ona osjećati goruću biološku presiju a onda i potrebu za njim. A te danas nema (E. Levi, 1927b, p. 2).

Prema tome postaje nam jasno troje: prvo, da španj. jezik, koji već imamo, trebamo razvijati uporedo s hebrejskim, koga još nemamo; drugo da španjolski jezik trebamo gojiti ako nećemo da s njim izgubimo i najveći intergralni dio našeg jevrejstva; treće, da pitanja, koja su u vezi s tim razvijanjem i čuvanjem, postaju vrlo umjesna²⁸ (E. Levi, 1927c, p. 2).

Levi even adds that the Judeo-Spanish language has the advantage over Hebrew in that its “spirit harmonizes with Sephardic mentality,” whereas Hebrew is not a language close to the Sephardic diaspora and it will be

²⁸ “Every time the Judeo-Spanish language is discussed, the question of the Hebrew language automatically comes up [...]. Some people thought that we had to strive for the advancement of the Hebrew language with all our might and *španjolski* had to be abandoned so that it would smoulder until it completely faded. Others thought that *španjolski* could not be left unattended so that it would finally vanish since throughout the centuries it had become the national language of the Sephardim.

However, if we, having lost *španjolski*, adopt the language of our environment – in our case Serbo-Croatian – and things cannot turn out differently, then the question of the Hebrew language will become much more difficult and more complex. There appears a question: is it possible for the Hebrew language to become the language of our Jewish community and, in fact, the language of Jewish groups in *Galut* [the Exile]. [...] For Hebrew to become a leading language of one entire ethnic community, the community has to feel a strong biological pressure as well as a need, but this is so far not the case.

Thus, three things become evident: firstly – we must develop *španjolski*, which we already have, along with Hebrew, which we do not yet have; secondly – we have to cultivate *španjolski* if we do not want to lose with it the greatest integral part of our Jewishness; thirdly – all questions related to this development and cultivation are becoming very relevant.”

difficult to learn it. This is also the reason why Judeo-Spanish should not be denied the right to exist (E. Levi, 1927b, p. 2).

It is sometimes observed in the resolutions and comments on the above-mentioned conference that Judeo-Spanish, although still the first language of great many Balkan Sephardic Jews, has to compete with other languages, hence the concerns about it and appeals for its preservation (collecting lexical and folklore corpora or developing grammar rules). At the same time, it is highlighted that these efforts will not be in contradiction to the natural development of Hebrew as fostered by the creation of a new Jewish culture in *Erec Israel* (“Rezolucije,” 1927, p. 4).

Language of little value

Contrary to the voices attributing an important role to Judeo-Spanish even at the beginning of the twentieth century, there appear opinions questioning the status of the language as well as its value. The discourse in the Bosnian Jewish press included opinions defining the Judeo-Spanish language as a language of the poorest Sephardic social classes. Such a statement appeared, for example, in a piece of reportage from one of the Sephardic districts in Skopje (the Macedonian communities were generally considered the poorest in the Balkans), in which apart from a detailed description of dilapidated streets and houses it was added that: “Na uglovima čopor bosonoge, prljave u rite obučene dece, koja galame i se prepiru na jeziku, koji su njihovi pradedovi pre nekoliko vekova doneli iz Španije”²⁹ (Alfandari, 1937, p. 3). As the language of the poor living in separate districts and avoiding contact with non-Jewish environment, Judeo-Spanish also appeared to be a fossilised language which was not developing, was deficient and resisted influences from other languages. At the same time, it was thought to be, on the one hand, one of the obstacles in the way of the assimilation and the adoption the languages of the environment and, on the other hand, one of the obstacles in the way of the development of a new Hebrew language and the promotion of the spirit of Zionism („A las comunidades sefardis en nuestros paizes!” 1927, p. 2).

The voices evaluating Judeo-Spanish negatively in the analysed Jewish press also include the ones which defined the language as “corrupt,” i.e. one which under the influence of languages of the environment “lost its harmony and beauty” and as a result, became incomprehensible. Judeo-Spanish is described in such a way when Šabetaj Djaen, a Sephardic writer from Serbia, tries to portray the language in his plays. That the result of his attempts does not appear to be very attractive in reception might be seen to

²⁹ “On the corners [there is] a cluster of barefooted, dirty children in rags, who make noise and quarrel in a language which their grandfathers brought from Spain a few centuries earlier.”

support the view that the very language he was emulating was at that stage less attractive, which found reflection in it being characterised as “corrupt” (M. Levi, 1922, p. 3).

Endangered, dying language

The Jewish press which appeared in the Balkans before the outbreak of World War II very often drew attention to the fact that Judeo-Spanish was already losing its status as the language of the Sephardim’s communication, and was an endangered language, fading away, abandoned in favour of languages of non-Jewish origin. Some authors wrote about this simply pointing to this fact, without displaying any emotional attitude towards it. An interview with a Bulgarian barrister of Sephardic origin, who described the lives of Bulgarian Sephardim, included observations about the condition of the language: all Jewish newspapers in Bulgaria appeared solely in Bulgarian; “the Spanish word” was seldom heard in Bulgarian Sephardic houses and if it was, it was not “pure.” The language was described as being in a poor condition (Attijas, 1927, p. 3). Still more radical opinions appeared in a review of the plays by above-mentioned Šabetaj Djaen, they claimed that in the Balkans no one actually read in this language or understood it anymore (M. Levi, 1922, p. 3).

Sometimes the poor condition of the Judeo-Spanish language was a pretext for heated press polemics. In the comments on the above-mentioned Sephardic conference from 1927 the supporters of the Zionist option, not without certain satisfaction, noted that the supporters of the Sephardic movement, which manifested the strength of Judeo-Spanish, had to take special courses and the speakers leaping to the defence of the language at the conference had prepared their speeches in Serbo-Croatian (Maestro, 1927, p. 2). It was highlighted that significant weakening of the condition of the language was a tendency characteristic of the Balkan Sephardic Jews but it repeated trends which existed in Western Europe earlier: the official language of the World Confederation of the Sephardim in the 1920s was French and its chairperson, although was fluent in a few languages, did not know the Judeo-Spanish language at all (“Sefardski Jevreji i španjolski jezik,” 1927, p. 2). The editors of the magazine *Narodna židovska svijest*, who after all were of Sephardic origin, emphatically expressed their view on the status of Judeo-Spanish, which, according to them, was so low that:

[...] je zaista nepojmljivo da ima ipak izvestan broj inače inteligentnih i razboritih ljudi, koji očuvanje španjolskog jezika kod Jevreja na Orijentu svom svoj snagom brane i propagiraju sa težnjom da se taj današnji unakaženi idijom modernizira i dotera tako, da bi od njega napravio pravi i narodni i literarni jezik. [...] On je kod nas već sada strahovito degenerisan, pa će se samim vremenom toliko istrošiti, da

od njega neće ostati ništa više što bi se jezikom zvati moglo [...]. Prema tome nas Sefarde ne vezuje više samo španjolski jezik u jednu grupu [...]³⁰ (“Sefardski Jevreji i španjolski jezik,” 1927, p. 2).

Conclusions

In the case of the Judeo-Spanish language the ambiguous attitude towards it can be observed within one and the same group of the Sephardim of Bosnia and Eastern Balkans, which was not so diverse as the groups of Western European Jews and the Ostjuden. That is why we do not find as negative connotations regarding the Sephardim language as in the case of Yiddish. The debate focused mainly on the range of a representative and communicative function of the language in the discussed period, while it was always highlighted that the language was closely connected with the Sephardic tradition. When attempts were made, however, to determine the condition of the language at that time, the opinions were discrepant: from the view highlighting a still current role of the language as both the language of communication and the indicator of identity to the view diminishing Judeo-Spanish and highlighting its decadence and slow decline.

³⁰ “[...] it is utterly inconceivable that there is still a certain group of intelligent and prudent people who with all their might defend the cultivation of the Spanish language among the Jews of the Orient and promote it so that this existing deformed idiom would modernise and adapt to become a real national and literary language. [...] Nowadays it is so awfully degenerate among us that it will fade under the influence of time alone and nothing will be left of it which could be called a language [...]. This means that it is not only the language which unites us, the Sephardim, in one group [...].”

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Języki jidysz i żydowsko-hiszpański jako wskaźniki tożsamości – na przykładzie żydowskich tekstów prasowych pierwszej połowy XX wieku

Artykuł ukazuje obraz i funkcje języków jidysz i żydowsko-hiszpańskiego wśród żydowskich grup diasporowych – bałkańskich Sefardyjczyków oraz Aszkenazyjczyków (*Ostjuden*) – w okresie od początków wieku XX do

wybuchu II wojny światowej. Opis oparty jest na artykułach z żydowskich magazynów, tygodników, prasy codziennej z przedwojennej Bośni i Hercegowiny oraz Niemiec/Polski. Ukazany jest ambiwalentny stosunek wobec języków. Z jednej strony – obraz języków jako wskaźników żydowskiej tożsamości, jak również obraz jidysz i żydowsko-hiszpańskiego jako wskaźników tożsamości w węższym ujęciu: tożsamości sefardyjskiej/aszkenazyjskiej w omawianym okresie. Z drugiej strony zaś – artykuł zwraca uwagę także na to, że oba języki były traktowane jako „zepsute”, „umierające” i stanowiące czynniki spowalniające asymilację grup żydowskich oraz przeszkodę dla idei syjonistycznych.

Note

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