

LESSON 5: LANGUAGE SPOTLIGHT: LADINO

Lesson Overview

Theme/Topic/Big Ideas:

- Diverse places Jews have lived
- Languages Jews have spoken
- How Jewish languages are similar to and distinct from their base languages

Summary: This lesson uses video and written examples to take a closer look at Ladino.

Essential Question(s)

- How did Jewish migrations impact languages?
- To what extent did Jewish communities integrate culturally into the host cultures of the countries to which they moved?

Objective:

In this lesson, students will:

- Learn some of the history of Ladino
- Recognize words from Spanish, Hebrew, and other languages in Ladino

Time: 65 minutes

Handouts and Visuals Link

Materials and setup

- Ladino videos and a way to play them
- Turn and talk questions written on the board or on a handout
- Printouts of primary source documents and the source exploration prompts
- Printouts of map or way to project the map image
- Access to internet-enabled devices for the students to conduct small-group research

Materials and setup

- Blank tabloid-size paper and markers or colored pencils for poster making
- Sticky notes and pens
- “Quick Bite” materials, as needed

<https://www.sephardicbrotherhood.com/what-is-ladino>

<https://www.jewishlanguages.org/judeo-spanish-judezmo-ladino>

Set Induction: Introduction to Ladino (15 min)

Watch this video, created by singer Carla Berg, and listen for words you recognize: En Keloheinu / Ein Keloheinu (Prayer Cover) "There is none like our G-d"

Turn and Talk:

- What stood out to you?
- What words did you recognize? What do they remind you of?
- What did you notice about the languages used? Do you have any guesses about what languages they are?
- What questions do you have?

Share: This singer is performing the prayer Ein Keloheinu in two languages: Hebrew, the common language of Jewish prayers, and Ladino, also known as Judeo-Spanish. Ladino is the language of Sephardic Jews – communities that originated in Spain.

Discuss: What do you know about Jewish communities in Spain?

Share:

- After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, Jews spread out, especially across the Mediterranean region, and many settled in the area that is now Spain and Portugal.
- In the 8th through 11th centuries, the Jewish experience in what is now Spain and Portugal involved a lot of interaction with Muslims and Christians. When Muslims ruled the area, starting in the 8th century, Jews in Spain were generally allowed to live according to Jewish laws and practices; some Jews earned great wealth and were active members of the court. Jews produced many great works of Jewish poetry and philosophy. During this time, Jews mostly spoke and wrote in Judeo-Arabic, a Jewish variety of the Arabic spoken by their Muslim neighbors.

Set Induction: Introduction to Ladino (15 min)

Handout Link

Share:

- During the 8th century, Catholics launched a series of military campaigns attempting to recapture land on the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslims. Ultimately, after nearly 400 years, they succeeded. In 1391, there was a large massacre of Jews in Northern Spain, and many Jews were forced to convert to Catholicism.
- By the 15th century, Catholics fully controlled Spain. They spoke Romance languages based on Latin, including Spanish. Jews began to speak these languages, sprinkled with Hebrew words, and many also continued to speak and read in other languages.

In 1492, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain ordered all Jews to convert to Catholicism or be expelled. This was known as the Edict of the Expulsion of the Jews (or the Alhambra Decree). Some Jews stayed and converted to Catholicism, and some of them continued to practice Judaism in secret. Others left, fleeing first to Portugal and then to other parts of Europe, North Africa, and the New World; most Spanish exiles fled to the Ottoman Empire (what is now Greece, Turkey, Serbia, and Bulgaria).

As a class, look together at this map.

- How do you think Sephardic Jews traveled from Spain to other countries? (By ship)

In their new locations, some Jews maintained their Jewish Spanish language instead of taking on the language of their new neighbors (such as Arabic in Morocco, Turkish in Turkey). This Jewish Spanish language came to be known as Haketia in Morocco and as "Spanyol" (Spanish) or "Djudio" (Jewish) in the Ottoman Empire. Today "Ladino" is the most common name for Ottoman Judeo-Spanish.

- Point to Morocco (north of Fez), where Jews spoke Haketia. Haketia developed in Northern Morocco, near the cities of Tangier and Tetouan.
- Point to Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia, where Jews spoke Ladino.

WATCH: Ladino (5 min)

Pass out pens and paper for notetaking.

Here's a video to give you a sense of how Ladino sounds. This man is a Sephardic Jew from Salonica, now known as Thessaloniki, Greece. Before World War II, this community was home to roughly 50,000 Ladino speakers. Sadly, most of them died in the Holocaust. Listen for any words you recognize, especially cognates (words that come from the same root, and therefore sound similar in more than one language). Write them down as you hear them.

WIKITONGUES: Jack speaking Ladino (Watch with captions until roughly minute 2:03.)

Did you recognize any words? Which ones and why were they familiar?

Primary Source Exploration (15 min)

[Handout Link](#)

Let's learn more by exploring documents and phrases written in Ladino. Break students up into pairs or small groups, and assign each group one of the following sources:

1. Postcard
2. Language book cover
3. Word: *desmazalado*
4. Phrase: "*kaminos de leche i miel*"

Have groups investigate their source by looking at the document/reading the caption (as relevant), making observations, gathering evidence, and forming a hypothesis about this source, using the following prompts:

- What do you see?
- What is familiar/unfamiliar?
- What might this document tell you about Ladino? (You'll be sharing this with the class at the end of the lesson.)

Full-class:

What alphabets are your documents written in? Latin letters (the same alphabet as English) and Hebrew letters (print and Solitreo cursive).

What languages do the words come from? We see many Spanish words and some Hebrew words. Ladino also picked up words from Turkish, Greece, and other languages spoken around Sephardic communities.

RESEARCH: Heritage Words (15 min)

Visuals Link

The first Jewish group to immigrate to the United States was Sephardic Jews from Brazil in 1654, and the first Jewish community was founded in Rhode Island in the 1670s. From the 1890s to the 1920s another wave of Sephardic immigrants arrived, this time Ladino speakers from Greece and Turkey (as part of a larger wave of Jewish immigration, mostly of Ashkenazic Jews from Eastern Europe). Sephardim settled in large cities, especially New York and Los Angeles. Many also settled in Seattle. Today, some descendants of these immigrants, especially in Seattle, still use some Ladino words within their English. We call these “heritage words” because they’re part of the heritage of a particular group. Here are two examples.

In pairs:

Pass out blank paper and markers/colored pencils. In pairs, go through this [list of heritage words](#) from Ladino used by Sephardi Jews in America. Click on “See Full Entry” for each, and find 3 words you think are interesting. For one of these words, create a poster that includes the word, the definition, an example sentence, and an illustration (like the “Word of the Week” images you just saw, but including drawings instead of photos). You’ll use this to help teach your word to the class.

Full class:

Each group shares the poster they created, teaching the rest of the class their selected word.

Optional Quick Bite: (5 min)

Watch this Ladino kids’ music video: [Las Komidas by Sarah Aroeste](#) or any of the [videos](#) (especially [TikTok shorts](#)) by Sarah Aroeste to get a flavor of Ladino and learn some new words.

Reflection/Conclusion: Sticky note “What sticks with you?” (5 min)

On a sticky note, have each student write down:

- One thing that surprised you today.

Optional Extension: Language Guests

Is there someone in your classroom or school community who speaks Ladino? Invite them in to share some vocabulary or for a Q and A session.

Optional Extension: Holiday Words

Teaching this lesson around a holiday time? Introduce Ladino words into your holiday-related lesson content. See

<https://www.jewishlanguages.org/judeo-spanish-judezmo-ladino>

for pepitada, a traditional drink consumed to kortar tanid (break the fast), velada (the all-night Shavuot studying tradition), or the Jewish Language Project's holiday exhibit pages for more holiday-specific vocabulary:

<https://www.jewishlanguages.org/samples>.