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Reflections on Judaeo-Spanish by a Spanish Jew

The following text formed part of an article that was printed in June 1938 in *La Aksyón*, a Judaeo-Spanish daily newspaper written in Hebrew characters that appeared in Salonica until after the outbreak of the 1939 war. The present article was written, under the pen name of Solombra, "Shadow", by Bezalel Levy who was born in Salonica, probably about 1870, but had emigrated to France where he lived in a Paris suburb. I met him in 1936 and our talk was naturally of Judaeo-Spanish, his native language, of which he had a wonderful knowledge. He referred to our meeting in one of his *Aksyón* articles that ended with these words:

"kon esto, sinyora ingleza, si kyerés ke boz bendigan loz ġidyós selaniklís, dalde konsežos de embezar el espanyol kastilyano i ečar en profundinaz de mar el žergona [sic] abastadreado ke ez el ġidyó espanyol."

The article I now reproduce in part was written in *raši* characters. I had it read over for me by both Mr. Samuel Francés, a Bradford wool-merchant, who frequently returns for holidays to his native Salonica, and by a lady from Salonica who now lives in London. It is their pronunciation I have endeavoured to represent in a simple phonetic alphabet instead of making a transliteration of the original print in which perforce many of the finer points of the dialect of Salonica are lost.

Of particular interest in this extract are the forms of address: the rabbi's wife says *él* to her husband, he says *bos* to her, whereas she and her neighbour say *lú* to one another. It is probable that she intends to address Mustapha the water-seller by *él* and that she expects him to say *eya*, but her knowledge of Turkish is so imperfect that the situation is not clear. Today, and for long

since, *bos* is not used to address a single person, but it appears here as a laughter-producing archaism. I have been informed that it is usual to say *usté* to a Grand Rabbi.

*

*kyen no se konsyente no byene de gente*¹.

*dikatlía*² aksyón,

*antez de meter la pala al forno, para enfornar la pita*³ *de kada byernes, déšame, kerida aksyón, kontarte una konsežika, afilú*⁴ *ke tú i el mundo-entero ya la konosés.*

*ya sabes ke, al tyempo de mvestra čikés*⁵, *tesalonikyi*⁶ *no tenía aínda kompánja*⁷ *de awa*⁸, *ke mos trušera este líkwido*⁹ *fista la*

¹ *kyen no se konsyente no byene de gente*. A proverb with the sense of 'qui ne pense pas à ce qu'il fait n'est pas de noble famille' (FOULCHÉ-DELBOSC, *RHisp.* 2, 343).

² *dikatlía* 'careful, who pays attention'. Turk. *dikkatli* supplied with the analogical Spanish feminine -a. Cf. *fazer dikát* 'be careful' = Turk. *dikkat etmek*.

³ *pita* 'cake'; fig. 'newspaper article of edifying nature'. WAGNER (*RFE* 34, 24, s. *albiñés*) gives the translation 'bollo', derives the word from Bulgarian and states that it has entered other Balkan languages. CIORANESCU (*Dicc. etim. rumano*, Tenerife 1960, p. 631) believes that Rum. *pitā* reflects mod. Gr. *πίτα* and refers to Turk. *pite*, Bulg. *pita*, etc. Cf. *pilas* (árabe [!]) 'hoja de masa cocida encima de hojatada ardiente' (ATTÍAS, *Romancero sefaradí*, Jerusalem 1956, p. 268).

⁴ *afilú* 'even if, although'. Heb. *ʾāfillū*.

⁵ *čikés* 'childhood'. Cf. *prestés* 'speed', *kontentés* 'happiness', *mansežés* 'youth'.

⁶ *tesalonikyi* 'Salonica'.

⁷ The spelling *qwmpanyja* suggests the pronunciation *kompánja*, with which cf. Bitolj *cumpaňe* (LURIA, *RHisp.* 79, 537), Morocco *compaña* (BENOLIEL, *BRAE* 15, 50), Leon., Astur., Galic., O.Span. *compaña* (GARROTE, *Dialecto vulgar leonés...*, Madrid 1947, p. 181), though one of my Salonica informants preferred the more modern *kompañía*.

⁸ *awa* 'water'.

⁹ *líkwido*. Probably Ital. *liquido* assimilated to Spanish speech habits. The real Judaeo-Spanish word for 'liquid' appears to be

kuzina del terso¹ pyano². kada kaza tenía su poĝo³ de awa šabda⁴ i abían una meumá⁵ de awadorez ĝidyós, ke bendían a kwatro yagúmes⁶ un de bente⁷ i suyuĝís⁸ turkos, ke bendían a un de bente el barriliko de awa.

a ĥarbí⁹ šelomó¹⁰ molĥo¹¹ lo tenía komo mušterí¹² el suyuĝí mustafá. un día de byernes, mustafá byene kon su azniko i la kargita de doz barrilikoz de awa.

bebraže; cf. si kalyó una gota de agua o resto de bebražes sobre el libro no puede lanberlo kon la luenga (Meam Loez, Jethro).

¹ *terso* 'third'. Probably a dialectal form of Ital. *terzo*. *Tersyo* is also known: *estavan dela manyana orboker* (Heb. *ʾór bōqer* 'light of the morning, dawn') *asta tersyas nočes lazrando* (written source) 'they were working hard from daybreak until far into the night', *como de ayer y de tercio día*, Gen. 31, 2 (Ferrara Bible).

² *pyano* 'floor, storey'. Ital. *piano*.

³ *poĝo* < *pūteum* 'well' (WAGNER, *RFE*, Anejo XVII, p. 17).

⁴ *šabda* 'tasteless, insipid' < **insapida*. Cf. Morocco *xebdo* 'soso, insípido' (BENOLIEL, *BRAE* 13, 216) and see WAGNER, *RFE* 34, 95/96, s.v., BÉNICHOU, *NRFH* 2, 265–268.

⁵ *meumá* 'quantity, number'. Heb. *mēʾûmâ* 'whatever, anything, something'.

⁶ *yagúm(es)*. Turk. *güĝüm* 'vessel of copper, with a handle, spout and lid, used for boiling water' (REDHOUSE, *Turkish-English Lexicon*, Constantinople 1890, p. 1599a). Turk. *ü* > *u* and here, by dissimilation, *ü* – *ü* > *a* – *u*. Turk. *g* + front vowel regularly yields *y* in Salonica, e.g. *güç* 'difficult' > *yuč*, *gülle* 'cannon-ball' > *yulé*, *gül* 'rose' > *yul*, *getir* > *yetir* (v. p. 331, N 14), *genc* > *yenč* (v. p. 332, N 13).

⁷ *un de bente* 'a 20-para piece'. Cf. *un de sinko*, *un de dyes*.

⁸ *suyuĝí* 'water-seller'. Turk. *sucu* 'water-seller' should appear as **suĝí*; our form is likely to be a pun on Turk. *soyucu* [*soyuĝú*] 'one who habitually robs, a brigand'. Cf. Salon. *suyudear* 'fleece, rob, strip naked' < Turk. *soymak* 'id.', *suydeadór* 'brigand', Smyrna *soydear* 'asaltar' (ESTRUGO, *Los Sefardíes*, La Habana 1958, p. 76).

⁹ *ĥarbí*. This title is used in addressing rabbis and is said to result from the combination of Heb. *ḥākām* 'wise man, scholar' + *ribí* (v. p. 334, N 1) 'master, teacher'. Cf. Smyrna *Harebí Daniel Gaón* (ESTRUGO, *op. cit.*, p. 102).

¹⁰ *šelomó* 'Solomon'. Heb. *šēlōmōh*.

¹¹ *molĥo*. A well-known surname.

¹² *mušterí* 'customer'. Turk. (Arab.) *müşteri*. *Muštería* is the analogical feminine.

– rubisa¹, grita mustafá de la pwerta de la kaye, su istérmi²?
 – yetér³, responde la rubisa, i kurryó al forno, espantándose
 no se le kemara el pastel.

mustafá se hwe a su kamino i bindyó la karga de awa a otra
 muštería⁴.

a la noče, la sinyora rubisa ke estubo el día entero aparežando
 el gizado para šabáð⁵, se apersibýó⁶ ke mustafá no subýó la awa.
 hwe menester de korrer ande la bizina tomar una mištrabá⁷ de
 awa emprestado⁸.

– kayada⁹, estáte byenbenida.

– mira ječaz negraz de mustafá! me dešó enkyinada¹⁰, kale¹¹
 sea ke el maljadoado topó otra muštería ke le pagó más karo.

em međyo el komer, se kyížo yido otra bes a demandar otra
 mištrabá de awa de la bizina.

¹ rubisa 'wife of a rabbi or teacher', the feminine of rubí 'maestro de escuela' (M. MOLHO, *Usos y costumbres de los Sefardíes*, Madrid/Barcelona 1950, p. 95). Cf. Smyrna robisa 'mujer del rabino' (ESTRUGO, *Retorno a Sefard*, Madrid 1933, p. 62), Morocco rebbisa 'maestra' (BENOLIEL, *BRAE* 13, 510).

² su istérmi? This question could for a Turk mean only 'does he (she) want any water?'. It is however the calque of J.Span. awa kyere eya? 'do you want any water?'. Genuine Turkish would be su istermisin(iz), the interrogative 2nd pers. sing. or plur. pres. indic. of istemek 'to want'. Later the rabbi's wife says su istér?, which is even more defective in that the interrogative particle mi is absent and so means, in Turkish, '(s)he wants some water'. For her, however, supplied with the appropriate interrogative intonation of Spanish, it represents awa kyere?.

³ yetér 'sufficient, enough'. Turk. yeter.

⁴ Cf. p. 329, N 12. ⁵ šabáð 'Sabbath'. Heb. šabbāṭ.

⁶ se apersibýó. Doubtless Fr. s'aperçut in Spanish dress.

⁷ mištrabá 'jug, jar, goblet' < Turk. (Arab.) *mišraba (v. CREWS, *VRom.* 20, 35/36).

⁸ tomar emprestado 'borrow'.

⁹ kayada 'hush, be quiet'. This remark was presumably made to silence the apologies of the rabbi's wife.

¹⁰ me dešó enkyinada 'left me in the lurch, difficulties'. Earlier (CREWS, *Proc. Leeds Phil. and Lit. Soc.* 7, 226, s. kyína), I sought to connect this verb with Turk. kin 'grudge, malice', but the relationship appears doubtful.

¹¹ kale sea ke 'it must be that'.

- *perdonada toz bea, rubisa, porké kačireáteš¹ oy a mustafá?*
demandó ħarbí šelomó.
- *así bib'él, syenta², ke no ez mi kulpa. afilú³ ke tenía el pastel*
a la lumbre⁴, yiné⁵ le ečí un grito a mustafá a ke trušera la awa.
- *en espanyol se lo dišíteš?*
- *no me tenga mal⁶. en trukwesko⁷. ya no me lo eskribyó él*
en la kača⁸ del libro?
- *kahén⁹ le respondíteš?*
- *kwando mustafá me demandó 'su istér¹⁰?' pišín¹¹ le respondi*
'yetér¹²'.
- *beš komo fizítež yerro. tyene razón el malġaðado ke no subyó*
la awa. kalía¹³ dezirle 'yetír¹⁴'.

¹ *kačirear* 'make or let run away'. Turk. *kaçırmak*.

² *syenta* 'listen'.

³ Cf. p. 328, N 4.

⁴ *lumbre* 'fire; light; oven'.

⁵ *yiné* 'even so, yet'. Turk. *yine* 'besides, moreover'.

⁶ *no me tenga mal* 'don't misunderstand me'.

⁷ *trukwesko* 'Turkish language', a metathesized form of *turk-wesko* (v. WAGNER, *Judenspanisch von Konstantinopel*, Wien 1914, p. 186), beside Salon. *trukesko* which I heard used in the proverb *yo ke se mučo en trukesko le laz digo i no paresko* (= ?). The popular dissimilated *trikwesko* was also known in Salonica.

⁸ *kača del libro* '[inside] cover'. Cf. *kača (de libro)* 'couverture' (CHÉREZLI, *Dictionnaire judéo-espagnol-français*, Jérusalem 1898/99); Salon. *lo meldí de kača a punta* 'je le lus d'un bout à l'autre' (SUBAK, *Judensp. aus Salon.*, Trieste 1906); *kača de kučío* 'mango' (CHÉREZLI, *op. cit.*), as in S. American Spanish (DCELC I, 564, s. *cacho*), Const. *kača* 'gaine de l'épée' (SUBAK, *ZRPh.* 30, 147), Salon. *catcha con punta* "'estuche con cuchilla" se dice cuando las cosas encajan bien' (SAPORTA, *Refranero sefardí*, Madrid/Barcelona 1957, p. 75), Bulg. *no ata kača kon punta* 'il ne réussit pas à joindre les deux bouts' (WAGNER, *RFE* 34, 62).

⁹ *kahén* 'how? in what manner?' < Span. *ké* + Heb. *ʾākēn* (CREWS, *VRom.* 14, 308, s. *kāhen*, for which read *kahén*).

¹⁰ Cf. p. 330, N 2.

¹¹ *pišín* 'at once, immediately'. Turk. *peşin*, *pişin* 'in the first place, beforehand'.

¹² Cf. p. 330, N 3.

¹³ *kalía dezirle* 'you ought to have said to him'.

¹⁴ *yetír* < Turk. *getir*, the sing. imperative of *getirmek* 'to bring'.

– ké *riferensya*¹ *ay?* *él no me tyene dičo ke la yod*² *bale por hírek*³ *i por seré*⁴? ké ez ‘yetér’, ké ez ‘yetír’? *alí óğa kon óğa alí*⁵!

– no, *mi fiža. yetér ez ‘ya basta’, yetír es ‘traye’.*

*si te kontí esta konseža, kerida aksyón, es ke en las pitaz*⁶ *mías ay en bezes yerros topatales*⁷. *en lugar de una letra, los tipográfes*⁸ *melen otra i me fazen dizir unoz byerbos a la rebéz de lo ke penso.*

*no lez meto dingún feo*⁹ *a loz laboradores tipográfes, porké loz dezmišadoz*¹⁰ *no entyenden las palabraz byežaz i abyžežentadas*¹¹ *ke en bezes empleo. estoz laboradores, no ay safék*¹² *ke son yén-ğes*¹³, *mansebikos ke no tyenen gwezmo*¹⁴ *del trukwesko, porké el bedre*¹⁵ *ya abía fečo ğizlán*¹⁶ *kwando binyeron al mundo.*

¹ *riferensya* ‘difference’. The Hebrew letters *daleth* [d] and *reš* [r] are very alike in appearance, but *riferensya* is almost certainly written frequently by this author and he probably intends to make a punning hybrid of *riša* ‘lottery’ with *diferensya*. MOLHO (*op. cit.*, p. 249) states that lotteries were commonly held at the Passover.

² *yod*. The Hebrew letter *yod* which, when unpointed, is to be read as either *i* or *e*.

³ *hírek*. The Hebrew vowel-point *híreq* which shows that *yod* has the value of *i* in Spanish and of *î* in Hebrew.

⁴ *seré*. The Hebrew vowel-point *šērē* which shows that *yod* has the value of *e* in Spanish and of *ē* or *ê* in Hebrew.

⁵ *alí óğa kon óğa alí*. Turk. *Ali hoca (con) hoca Ali*, with the sense of ‘six of one and half a dozen of the other’.

⁶ Cf. p. 328, N 3.

⁷ *yerros topatales*. On three occasions I have found this adjective used by the same writer in reference to mistakes. It presumably means ‘gross, wholesale, colossal’. Perhaps it is to be connected with *bender toptán* < Turk. *toptan vermek* ‘vendre en gros, en bloc’ + an adjective of the type of *kolosal*.

⁸ *tipográfes*. Fr. *typographes*.

⁹ *meter feo a alguno* ‘blame anyone’ (CREWS, *op. cit.*, p. 222).

¹⁰ *dezmišado* ‘unfortunate, luckless’. (See MALKIEL, *Hisp. Rev.* 15, 290, N 85.)

¹¹ *abyžežentado* ‘obsolete, obsolescent’. Cf. *abyžežentar* ‘pareser viežo, paraître vieux’ (CHÉREZLI, *op. cit.*); *enbežeser* ‘grow old’.

¹² *safék* ‘doubt’. Heb. *sāfēq*.

¹³ *yénğes* ‘young men’. Turk. *genc* + *-es*.

él ke no merese aškolsún¹, es él ke aze la agá², el korižador³. para korižār³ la pita, se kyere algún benadán⁴ ke biđo enforar pita en su kaza, kyere dizir uno ke nasyó kwarenta anyoz antes, ke tyene aínda loz oídoz yenos, no de estúrkol⁵, ma⁶ de palabraz byežas, de ĵudýo-espanyol kaštireado⁷ komo kwando faziamoz čomlék⁸.

me akođro kwando los tipográfes eran byežos kon entožos⁹ i no dešaban fuyir el más čiko yerro kwando salian de la estampa.

¹⁴ *gwezmo* 'smell; inkling, notion'.

¹⁵ *beđre* 'green; nickname for a Turk (because descendants of the Prophet wore green Turbans)' (WAGNER, *RFE*, Anejo XVII, p. 47).

¹⁶ *ječo ĵizlān*. Turk. *cızlamı çekmek* 'go away (slang)' (HONY, *Turkish-English Dict.*², Oxford 1957), 'sich aus dem Staube machen' (HEUSER-ŞEVKET, *Türkisch-deutsches Wörterbuch*, Istanbul 1942).

¹ *aškolsún* 'bravo! well done!'. Turk. *aşk olsun*.

² *azer la agá* 'act as foreman, correct proofs'. *Agá* fem. is to be connected with Turk. *ağa* 'lord, master'.

³ *korižār*. Fr. *corriger*. Cf. *korižador*.

⁴ *benadán* 'person'. Heb. *ben ʾadām* 'son of man; human being'.

⁵ *estúrkol*. A pun: *turko* + *estyérkol*.

⁶ *ma* 'but'. Ital. *ma*.

⁷ *kaštireado* 'mixed'. The popular dissimilated rendering of more learned Salon. *karištirear* < Turk. *kariştirmek* 'add and mix one thing into another'. Cf. Salon. *ninguno puede kaštirearse en lo ke una persona kyere fazer* 'interfere'; Smyrna *no te carishterees* 'no te metas donde no te importa' (ESTRUGO, *Los Sejardies*, p. 76); Const. *karištirear* 'mischen' (WAGNER, *Judenspanisch von Konstantinopel*, Wien 1914, p. 161).

⁸ *čomlék* 'macédoine de légumes; des choses mélangées' < Turk. *çömlek* 'earthenware pot [used for preparing stews]'. The more popular *čomblék* also occurs.

⁹ *entožos* 'spectacles', as also Bosnian *intožus* (SUBAK, *ZRPh.* 30, 143), Bitolj *intojus* (LURIA, *RHis.* 79, 456). See MALKIEL, *RPhil.* 3, 51, N 113. Sofia *vintožos* 'Augengläser' (SUBAK, *Vorläufiger Bericht*..., Wien 1910, p. 2) shows perhaps the contamination of *biđro* 'glass'; cf. Salon. *un solo biđro de entožo al ožo đerečo* 'a monocle in his right eye'.

*ya sabes ke yo so ribí¹ pasensya, no me kešo katíkoláy², amá³
ček ček kopárma⁴.*

*no ay safék⁵ ke por endelantre baž a fazer máz dikát⁶, sea
porké el meldador entyenda lo ke está meldando, sea porké no se
tome sehorá⁷ SOLOMBRA.*

Leeds, October 1961

Cynthia Crews

¹ *ribí* 'master, teacher'. In older texts, in Latin characters, I find *reby* and in more modern pointed Hebrew texts *ribbí*, for Heb. *rabbí*. Cf. also Oriental *rubí* 'maestrescuela' (MOLHO, *op. cit.*, p. 88), Morocco *rebbe* 'maestro, señor' (BENOLIEL, *BRAE* 13, 216), Alcazarquivir *el rebbi* 'maestro de niños' (CANTERA, *HMP* 5, 90).

² *katíkoláy*. Turk. *kati* 'very', *kolay* 'easily'. Cf. *kati koláġ* 'tan fácilmente' (WAGNER, *RFE* 34, 27, s. *antika*).

³ *amá* 'but'. This and similar forms, all ultimately from Ital. *ma*, appear in Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Bulgarian and Serbian (WAGNER, *RFE*, Anejo XVII, p. 76).

⁴ *ček ček kopárma* 'endure it without noisy expostulation'. Probably Turk. *çek*, imperative of *çekmek* 'suffer, endure', *koparma*, negative imperative of *koparmak* 'set up an outcry'.

⁵ Cf. p. 332, N 12. ⁶ Cf. p. 328, N 2.

⁷ *tomarse sehorá* 'grieve, feel grief'. Heb. (*mārā*) *šēḥôrā* 'melancholy, grief' (YAHUDA, *RFE* 2, 369; LURIA, *RHis*. 79, 550).