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More on ‘enemy’ = ‘hangnail’

In «Aragonés *enemigo*, alemán *Neidnagel*», Germán Colón cites a number of seventeenth-century Hispanic sources in which the word for ‘enemy’ also means ‘hangnail’ (*Festschrift Walther von Wartburg zum 80. Geburtstag / 18. Mai 1968*, Kurt Baldinger, ed., Tübingen [Max Niemeyer] 1968, vol. 2, pp. 415–420). The purpose of the present note is to show that ‘enemy’ = ‘hangnail’ is not limited to the languages he cites and that this phenomenon dates back at least to the fifteenth century.

In his *Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Judenspanischen von Konstantinopel* (Vienna, 1914), Max Leopold Wagner writes: «*enemigo* heißt man in Konstantinopel die den Nagel umgebende rissige Haut. Aus dem Vorhandensein einer solchen will man erkennen, daß man Feinde hat» (p. 182). He adds: «Vgl. Dial.-pg. (Alemtejo): *imigos* ‘pelliculas em volta das unhas’ Thomaz Pires, *Revista Lusitana* X 251.»

According to Sara Yontan, the phenomenon is still current in Istanbul Judezmo¹. She has heard (in the 1960s and 1970s) *inimiyo* (and sometimes *enimiyo*), both in the sense of ‘enemy’ as well as ‘hangnail’. However, she does not recognize the form *enemiyo* (i.e., Wagner’s *enemigo*). According to her mother (born in Istanbul in 1922), there is a folk belief among Sephardic Jews in Istanbul that a hangnail is caused by nervousness or stomach trouble.

A consultant for Izmir reports *inimiyo* ‘enemy; hangnail’ too, but does not know about the folk belief. My consultant for the Judezmo of Ruse (Bulgaria), the late Nisim Varon, reported ‘enemy’ = ‘hangnail’ too (unfortunately I did not record his pronunciation of the word) and I suppose that this usage is universal (or nearly so) in Southeastern Judezmo (= that of the Ottoman Empire and its successor states). I have no information on other varieties of the language.

There is strong circumstantial evidence that ‘enemy’ = ‘hangnail’ has been present in Southeastern Judezmo ever since the beginnings of this variety of the language, i.e., since the first Judezmo-speakers settled in the Ottoman Empire. Here is the evidence for this assumption: firstly, although there were Marranos leaving the Iberian Peninsula in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who made their way to Judezmo-speaking communities in the Ottoman Empire (where they became public Jews and were integrated into these communities), these people had little, if any, influence on Southeastern Judezmo. It was not Marranos, arriving later than the original Jewish settlers, therefore, who introduced this usage into Judezmo. Secondly, after Jews from

¹ The glottonym *Judezmo* is explained in my *Dzhudezmo*, *Language Sciences* 47 (October 1977), 14–16; *Planning Glottonyms for Jewish Languages (With Emphasis on Judezmo and Yahudic)*, in press in: RICHARD E. WOOD, ed., *Language Planning and Language Treatment: Worldwide Case Studies*; and *More on the Glottonym Judezmo*, ms.

the Iberian Peninsula settled in the Ottoman Empire, they had virtually no contact with non-Jews from the Peninsula. The occasional non-Jewish traveler, seaman, or diplomat from the Peninsula who happened to be in the Ottoman Empire could not possibly have influenced local Judezmo and certainly not in such an «intimate» sphere as the term for a minor body part. And the few Jews living in the Ottoman Empire who visited the Iberian Peninsula were unlikely to bring back such an «intimate» term either.

Having shown that there is every reason to believe that 'enemy' = 'hangnail' has always been present in Southeastern Judezmo, we must answer the following question: did it arise in SE Judezmo spontaneously or was it brought to the Ottoman Empire from the Iberian Peninsula? Since this phenomenon is present in several non-Jewish Hispanic languages (cf. Colón's and Pires's articles), it would be an extraordinary coincidence were the SE Judezmo phenomenon a spontaneous creation there. It is much more likely that 'enemy' = 'hangnail' was present in one or more of the Jewish languages of Sefarad 1 (= the pre-sixteenth-century Iberian Peninsula as it is called in Jewish geography).

In the absence of any citations from Jewish texts (in whatever language) from Sefarad 1, it is impossible to tell by what channel(s) this phenomenon reached Jews in Sefarad 1. Here are several possibilities:

- (a) Portuguese > Portuguesic > Southeastern Judezmo
- (b) Portuguese > Portuguesic > Central Judezmo > Southeastern Judezmo
- (c) Aragonese > Aragonic > Southeastern Judezmo
- (d) Aragonese > Aragonic > Central Judezmo > Southeastern Judezmo
- (e) Catalan > Catalanic > Southeastern Judezmo
- (f) Catalan > Catalanic > Central Judezmo > Southeastern Judezmo.

Central Judezmo is the Judezmo of Sefarad 1. Portuguesic, Aragonic, and Catalanic are the Jewish correlates, respectively, of Portuguese, Aragonese, and Catalan. Since there were quite a number of Portuguesic-, Aragonic-, and Catalanic-speakers among the first Sefaradim to arrive in the Ottoman Empire in the early sixteenth century (though Judezmo-speakers were in the majority and speakers of all these other Jewish languages eventually shifted to Judezmo), they (the Portuguesic-, Aragonic- or Catalanic-speakers) may have introduced this usage into Southeastern Judezmo, without it ever having been present in Central Judezmo – for, unlike the later-arriving Marranos (see above), these early Portuguesic-, Aragonic-, and Catalanic-speakers in the Ottoman Empire could have had some influence on Southeastern Judezmo. Hence possibilities (a), (c), and (e). I have no evidence that 'enemy' = 'hangnail' was present in Catalanic, Aragonic, or Portuguesic, and only assume such a possibility because the phenomenon has been documented for the non-Jewish correlates of these languages.

On the other hand, 'enemy' = 'hangnail' may already have been present in Central

Judezmo; hence possibilities (b), (d), and (f). Since no two of these six possibilities are mutually exclusive, any one of a number of them may reflect the truth.

A seventh possibility is: (g) Spanish > Central Judezmo > Southeastern Judezmo. Colón was able to find only one citation for Spanish *enemigo* 'hangnail', in Baltasar Gracián's *El Criticón*. However, Gracián was Aragonese and his usage is probably an Aragonism. Nonetheless, it is possible that 'enemy' = 'hangnail' was once found in Spanish, but that it simply failed to get recorded. After all, how many texts mention hangnails?

Portuguese and Catalan are on the Hispanic periphery. Areal linguistics has shown that peripheral areas are often relic areas, preserving items no longer found in central areas. The Portuguese and Catalan phenomena may be related in one of three ways:

- (a) One language borrowed from the other;
- (b) In each language the phenomenon arose independently;
- (c) A common etymon should be reconstructed to account for all the occurring forms.

The first possibility is unlikely, for there are virtually no Portuguesisms in Catalan or Catalanisms in Portuguese. Furthermore, 'enemy' = 'hangnail' is obviously part of folk speech and there has been no direct contact between the Portuguese-speaking and Catalan-speaking folk.

The second possibility must be given serious consideration, though the laws of probability militate against the likelihood that precisely the same metaphor, 'enemy' > 'hangnail', should arise in two languages independently of each other.

The third possibility seems most likely to me. If there was a common etymon (Early Hispanic Romance? Late Hispanic Latin?), a reflex might have been present in Spanish (and simply failed to be recorded, as noted above) or it might never have entered Spanish.

In any case, the Judezmo data suggest that 'enemy' = 'hangnail' is older than the sources Colón has found. His earliest source is a Catalan dictionary from around 1650 (p. 416). In the light of the foregoing, I conclude that this phenomenon is at least one hundred and fifty years older.

I would venture a guess that Judezmo *inimiyo* is a blend of the Spanish-origin Judezmo word *enemiyo* and Portugueseic **inimigu*. If *enemigo* 'hangnail' was never present in Spanish, the meaning 'hangnail' is of Portugueseic (and Aragonic and/or Catalanic?) origin. If *enemigo* never meant 'hangnail' in Spanish, Judezmo *enemiyo* is formally of Spanish origin and semantically of Portugueseic (and Aragonic and/or Catalanic?) origin.

Colón extends his study to German and Dutch (*Neidnagel*, *Niednagel*, *nijnagel*). English is relevant too: *felon* (< Middle English *feloun* 'suppurative sore' < Old French *felon* 'villain') is defined by *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* (1961) as 'a usually suppurative infection involving the deep

tissues on the palmar surface of a fingertip'; 'a severe inflammation on a finger or toe especially if involving the bone'. For more on English terms for 'hangnail' see Map 78 'a loose piece of skin (below or at the side of a fingernail)' in *The Linguistic Atlas of Scotland*, edited with an introduction by J. Y. Mather and H. H. Speitel, Scots Section, volume 2, London (Croom Helm) 1977 (the map is on p. 89 and there is more information on pp. 192–193) and Maps L 49A and L. 49B 'loose piece of skin' of *The Linguistic Atlas of England*, edited by Harold Orton, Stewart Sanderson, and John Widdowson, London (Croom Helm) 1978 (there is more information in Appendixes 2 and 3). To Colón's data from the Turkic languages (p. 420, N 11) one may add Turkish *seytan turnagi* 'hangnail'. According to Augusto Malaret, the term in Central American, Colombian, and Mexican Spanish is *mezquino* (defined as 'verruga; respingón o padrastro que sale en los dedos' in his *Diccionario de Americanismos*, 3rd. ed., Buenos Aires [Emecé] 1946).²

* * *

This article has shown how Jewish languages may, on occasion, elucidate problems in the history of non-Jewish languages: the Jewish data are circumstantial evidence that 'enemy' = 'hangnail' is at least a hundred and fifty years older than the 1650 Catalan dictionary would lead us to believe.

For yesterday's student of «Judeo-Spanish», the «dialect» was usually nothing more than an aid in discovering facts about Spanish. For today's student of the Judezmo language, on the other hand, its usefulness as such an aid is only one of his many concerns³.

Haifa

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² Hebrew-speakers know what a hangnail is, but they have no lexeme for it. What the dictionaries give are only periphrases. NAHUM STUTCHKOFF's *Thesaurus of the Yiddish Language*, New York 1951, records *prie-nogl* (consisting of a Hebrew-Aramaic-origin word + a German-origin word), whose meaning I have been unable to determine.

³ See my *Jewish Intralinguistics as a Field of Study, International Journal for the Sociology of Language* 29 (1981). This article was written thanks to a grant from the *Merkaz Liklita Bamada*. An earlier version was presented in my course «The Languages of Sefardic Jewry» at the University of Haifa.