

The Spanish - Jewish Humor of the Sephardic Jews in the Balkan Countries, especially Bulgaria, Origin, Properties, Examples, Categories and Relationship to other Languages



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This study tries to create Categories of Sephardic Jokes

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1. Jewish Joke, important Scholars and Writers

According to Sigmund Freud the Joke is the “very last weapon of the defenseless” with a reference to the Jewish people in his book “The Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious”, NY, 1910. Based on the humor and irony from the work of Heinrich Heine, Freud presents an analysis on the Origin of Humor (particularly of the Jewish Humor).

For example, **funny words**, created by a smart **combination of the syllables** of two different words, like:

FAMILIAR

MILLIONAIRE: Baron Rotschild received and treated me quite **FAMILLIONAIR**ly or:

ALCOHOL

HOLIDAY : We spent some marvelous **ALCOHOLIDAY**s

- Or, a Word, in which two Syllables could mean quite different things from the current context:
 - **My son is very smart , he is just like**
Jean- Jacques Rousseau
 - Yes , In fact he is **Rousse** and **Sot** :
Red Hair and **Stupid**

**This is one of the important ways
for creating Jewish Jokes or funny Wordplays**

**The unlimited use of different languages, especially in
humor, typical of Jews in Europe is here visible**

2. Sephardic Joke

Sephardic versus Ashkenazic Humor

In the Yiddish world there are wonderful works on Humor, including collections of Jewish Jokes around the world, from Kiev to New York. **They are based on the life in the Stetl, the Jews' business and on Talmudic issues, moreover there are jokes about the famous Jewish insolence – Chutzpá or Chútzpe (חוצפה) or Evil Eye (עין רעה) – Ein Ra**

Unfortunately, we , the Sephardim don't have it yet in such a perfectly systemized and analyzed way. However our Humor is a jewel (**una djoya**) and **emerged from every day's life and the immense quantity and mixture of languages, which we have been using for centuries.**

3. Ladino (Djudezmo) and the Humor on the Balkans, especially Bulgaria, Origin, Interlinguistic Impact

Bulgaria was, during the Ottoman rule for 5 centuries (1396-1878), a country, quite **isolated from the rest of Europa**, nearly without any influence from the Renaissance, the Reformism or the Haskalah (Enlightenment) Movement of Moses Mendelssohn. In 1938 the Jewish population in Bulgaria was 48000:

Sephardim (82%) and

Ashkenazim (18%)

All they **survived** during the Holocaust.

Even a small country, there was in Bulgaria
an important mixture of Ethnic Groups and
Religions

The coexistence of the Jews with all those
groups significantly enriched the Judeo-Spanish
Language (Djudezmo)

For that reason, Ladino from
Bulgaria is much **richer and funnier.**

In Ladino (Djudezmo), as spoken in Bulgaria, a big quantity of borrowed words and expressions from other languages have been introduced, like:

Turkish, Greek, Arnaut (Albanese), Italian, French, and even some Roma- Gipsy as well as from:

Bulgarian, Romanian, German and Yiddish

and a lot of Sephardic jokes, proverbs, wordplays and anecdotes have been created

4. Ladino (Djudezmo) from Bulgaria: Examples of Jokes and Wordplays, created in various circumstances - “las Shakás Djudías”. Sephardic Humor Categories:

Popular Djudezmo Expressions and Jokes on Health :

- A Jewish woman goes to the doctor, afterwards she talks to the neighbor : **El doctór me disho que tengo Alegría**, Barminam! Que Alegría? **Sto hazina.**

(The doctor told me, I have got **Alegría- joy, happiness, simkha**)

- My God, a joy? I'm feeling bad ! I'm sick !

In fact, the doctor detected: **Alérgia - Allergy**

- Someone , with cold and hoarse :

Este Benadam tiene Garón Çatlak

(mixture of Hebrew, Turkish , Djudezmo)

(This guy has the throat “Broken and Twisted”)

Funny everyday expressions

- **Por Prasa y Kalavasa** = Leeks and Pumpkin (that means: Rubbish, Unimportant)
(from Turkish Pirasa= Leeks) **or**
- **Trancas** = Clothespins (means Nonsens)
- **Avagár como Mandá Pósta** = This Mail (Post) is too slow (**avagár**).The Mail is coming on a Buffalo Cart-Expression used by Sephardim about a person, who acts very slowly, like a Buffalo (**Mandá**- Turkish)

Funny everyday expressions: Ladino/Turkish

- Sarhoshlik en todo el Anyo y briyando como Karanfil para Purim
- Drunkenness all year round and shining like a Clove at Purim, while everybody is drinking of joy.
from Turkish: Karanfil = Clove Sarhoshlik = Drunkenness
(that means : **an inappropriate behavior**)

Hebrew Aleph Beth used in Ladino

The Food : Kasher or Trefa ?

WHAT IS KASHER ?: in Ladino,

Ka - she - r : Khav - Shin - Resh : כ ש ר

Karo - Shavdo – Ralo (Expensive - Tasteless - Rare)

WHAT IS TREFA? : in Ladino,

T- re- fa : Tet – Resh – Pe – He : ט ר פ ה

Todo - Ropa – Fina (Perfect Quality Stuff)

Similar in Amer-Yiddish

(from the book “The Joys of Yiddish” , by Leo Rosten)

Cosher? = No , Sir!

Treif ? = Safe!

Expressions and Rhymes in Ladino based on a mixture of different languages

Examples: using rhyme in French, Ladino, Yiddish:

- Comment ça va?- Como la vavá. No, betér, como la bisvavá!
- Comment allez-vous?- Como el papú, No, betér , como el bispapú!

(turkish, **betér** = worse)

- *How are you?- Like my Grand Mother / - Father. No worse, like my Great Grand Mother/ - Father*

- Esti **Güvetch stá un Qvetch!** (Ladino-Turkish-Yiddish) (**Güvetch-**turkish/ sephardic dish, קוועטשן **Qvetchn-** Yiddish:

(it means : crushed, ugly)

This Güvetch is a Qvetch (a tasty dish, but badly prepared)

More Rhimes Ladino- Turkish

The word **şamar** (*shamar*) in turkish means: **Slap**
and **şalvar** (*shalvar*) means: **Trousers**

The mother warns the child :

Negregúra !

Ti vo dar un şamar y te se kaye el şalvar !

Bad Boy! I'm gonna slap you so hard, that your trousers
will fall down!

Humor based on some linguistic features of Ladino

In Ladino “**B**” and “**V**” are clearly pronounced.

So , “El Yavani” means “ The Greek” , היווני in Hebrew and “ Yabani” in Turkish means “Savage, Violent”

A funny expression about a guy with a very aggressive behavior

Esti Yavani es un Yabani : This Greek is Savage, Wild, Violent.

Humor created in mixed families between Sephardim of different Balkan countries

Mixed Families like **Sephardim from Turkey and Bulgaria :**

About arrogance and bragging of young people:

Los pepinos ajarvan al bahchivan- the Cucumbers hit the gardener (Turkey)

Los mansévos, kuando pishan al teneke,del gürültü pensan ke pasa avion- The young people, when they urinate on a metal sheet, because of the noise they think, that an airplane is flying over (Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, etc.)

Humor created in mixed families between Sephardim and Ashkenazim in the Balkan countries

Mixed Families **Ashkenazim y Sephardim** on the Balkans:
About a child, very vital, who is moving nonstop, they say :

1. Culiko de negosios (= a Backside of Business)

-The child is moving and running like a businessman
- in Ladino

2. טאָכעס פול פון געשעפט (**Tuches full fon Guesheft**) –

- the same, but in Yiddish

The Jews from different Bulgarian cities used to be called by funny **nicknames** in Ladino :

Jews from Plovdiv (Felibé): Felibelís
Felibelís - Patchas di Guma (Rubber Legs)

Plovdiv (Trimontium- three Hills, Latin) is located among many hills and one had to walk a lot.

The “Djudios de Plovdiv” (Los Filibelís)- A joke

The Jews from Plovdiv used to eat nonstop **Pipitas de Kalavasa** (Pumpkin Seeds), almost an illness ! And... they even measured distances not in kilometers, but in quantities of seeds eaten!

A Sephardic Joke from Plovdiv:

Reuben meets Avram on the street and asks him:

- **Andi vas Avramiko?**
- **A vijitar a mi tío Bokhor**
- **Es muy leshos?**
- **No, de akí a...una aldikera entera di Pipitas di Kalavasa**

Whereto , Avramiko? – To visit my uncle Bokhor

Is it too far?- Not at all, from here to.... a Pocket full of Pumpkin Seeds

Examples of Sephardic humor in the cultural area

- The comments of a Jew from Plovdiv, after a bad theatre performance, using a rhyme:

No djugaron Shakespeare , ama Eshek- Ispir!

(It wasn't Shakespeare, but Eshek-Ispir (A donkey from Ispir))

- After a devastating critique on a literature work, published in a Sephardic magazine (probably La Alvorada de Rustchuk), the author replied to the critic:

Kerido senyor, sto meldando su ermoza kritika en la privada, la kamareta mas chika de mi kaza, agora la tengo delante de mi, ama en un minuto la vo tener detras de mi.....

Dear Sir, I'm reading your beautiful critique in the smallest room of my house, the toilet, at the moment I'm having it before me, but in a minute, I will have it behind me...

Funny Expressions originated from Aphorisms created by famous wise Jews

Example :

**Si la Haftuná se puede eskrivir,
vas a resivir una karta muy larga de mi.**

(Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon, RAMBAM, Maimonides)

haftuná = beating comes from Hebrew

That means: If the beating (trashing) could be expressed by writing, you are going to receive a very long letter from me.

(Maimonides)

Combined Phrases using : French, Turkish, German (or Yiddish) and Djudezmo at the same time

Example: A conversation , 1910, in the yard of the synagogue of Plovdiv between two Jews from the business world :

Literally:

¿**Bank Disconto Gesellschaft peimanlarí sistemé o ya scapo?**

Deciphered:

¿**Les Paiements - de Bank Disconto Gesellschaft- se estimer - o ya scapo?**

Will the Payments of Disconto Gesellschaft Bank (Berlin) be re - calculated or it's over?

(peimanlari = les paiements, the payments , plural (-ari) in Turkish)

(scapó – it is over , Djudezmo)

Sephardic Humor even during the Holocaust!

Bulgarian Jews created during the Shoa a specific Sephardic Slang, in order not to be discovered by the authorities, when they were listening to Bulgarian clandestine Radio Stations , like London, Cairo, Moscow. That Slang contained a mixture of words in Ladino, Hebrew, Turkish or Bulgarian.

Example : El mustacho grandi arondjó y covaleó al mustacho chico del **TRIGO** . Ursuz, Patlá, al Djennem!

That means: Stalin got rid of Hitler in Zhitómir (Ladino)
Ominous!, Be damned!, Go to Hell! (curse words from Turkish).

Zhitomir (in Ukraine) was for the Nazis their last bastion before their withdrawal from the USSR in January, 1944.

ZHITO-MIR: In Búlgarian (Russian) , **ZHITO** means **WHEAT** (or **TRIGO** in Spanish and Ladino).

Such a smart Encryption! We can't believe at all, that a bulgarian policeman could have deciphered this **Sephardic puzzle**.

Jewish Humor during Communism

The bureaucratic communist regime was annoying:

Bureaucracy : Bureau (french) + Cratia (greek)
Office, Desk Force, Rule

(Word created during Napoleon)

- A Joke in **Yiddish** (by the Jews from the USSR):

Buró-Krat : Bureau + Kratsen zein Noz קראַצן זײַן נאָז
(Yiddish: sitting at the desk and scratching his nose)

- Same funny expression in **Ladino** from Bulgaria:

¿**Burokrát?** El ke no azi nada, sta achunkado en la mesa, arascando se la nariz.

Assimilation – Some Jews had their names changed, in order to be assimilated, and ... what was the result...?

The most frequent assimilation happened probably in Hungary, called for fun by the Jews : Magyarization.

A Jew from Budapest, a man named NATHAN FIDDLER (Yiddish: Fiddler–Violin Player), had his name changed to:

MIKLOS HEGEDÜT !!! (Hungarian: Violín) Cute!

Bulgarian Sephardim didn't stay far behind, a Jew from Sofia, named : ISAAC BEN BASAT (Son of Basat): יוֹצֵר (Hebrew : The Winner, The Glorious), got a new name: IVAN SINDIACONOV .

SIN DIACONOV (The Son of the Deacon, a Clerical)

Due to his ignorance he was wrong in thinking , that Basat signified Deacon or Priest . Brilliant...!

Strange Words or Expressions created by the Jews, in order to present great personalities as being allways from Jewish Origin

The Ludwig van Beethoven case:

Ashkenazim claim, that his surname was: **Ben Teuven**

Sephardim say, Beethoven's surname was **Beth Khoven**

(perhaps Beth Cohen?)

Sephardim claim, Sergei Rachmaninov was a Jew ??

So they invented the name **Sergei Rakhamim-ov.**

Sephardim say, that the famous french movie actor of the
30's Harry Baur was a Jew? So they put him the following
surname: **"Harry Bor – Haribí Bokhor "**

In other words, an authentic (turkish Maitap-Shaká) - Joke

Shakás çarpeadas (Jokes of ill taste) in Ladino

There are as well some Sephardic jokes, which are not polite:

- ¿Kuántos anyos tiene Haribí Shmuel, el viejo? Ya 100, ama el komió Tutkal y esto le pegó la alma para syempre.

(Tutkal in Turkish : glue; Haribí in Hebrew : a wise man)

Haribí Shmuel is already 100 years old, but he ate some glue, so his spirit has been stuck.

- About a man or woman, who is nonstop talking a lot , moreover stupid things, they use to say: El (Eya) tieni mayasil en la boka y para aliviar avla munchas bavajadas. (mayasil , Turkish means: hemorrhoids) So, imagine, this person has this “fine” illness in the mouth and is talking constantly, in order to relieve the itching.

Sephardim, Sephardim...

5. Future Studies

We have to admit here, that we, Sephardic Jews, haven't created yet a true compendium of Sephardic Joke and Humor, like e.g. the book of Salcia Landmann: Jewish Jokes - Jüdische Witze, /17/. It is necessary to study and create much more categories of sephardic humor, e. g. on Sephardic counterpart of Shnorrers, the tedious ones- Dankavés, or Pezgados, on applying and removing Evil Eye : (Ain-Ra עין רעה ; Ain-Takhat עין תחת), etc. All those things are for having fun and loving Ladino. We have got to work much more, in order to spread the Sephardic Culture and Language. **We can't permit its disappearance.**

If you liked this speech, you'd say in
Ladino :

**Muncho Mercí, nos patleimos de riza,
fue un maitap grande.**

And...if the speech was boring, we
would hear voices in Ladino, like:

**Esti profesor es muy pezgado –
pezgado kurshum - ¡Kurshumaná!
¡Pezgado Tutkal!**

A question
that sometimes
drives me hazy:
am I or are the
others crazy?

- Albert Einstein

~EM~

