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What can stress placement tell us about (in)stability in language contact: the case of Judeo-Spanish in Bulgarian

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The term Judeo-Spanish (JS) refers to the varieties of Spanish spoken by the Sephardic Jews in their new areas of settlement after their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula starting in 1492. From that point on, JS developed independently from other Spanish varieties but in close contact with the respective surrounding languages. The Bulgarian variety of JS (BJS) is spoken today by probably less than 25 mature L1 speakers, the youngest of whom were born in the early 1960s. All speakers are at least bilingual and clearly dominant in BG. Their BJS is known to show both many archaic structures resembling Old Spanish and many contact-induced innovations (see, e.g., Fischer & Vega Vilanova 2018 and Gabriel & Grünke 2022 on cross-linguistic influence at the morphosyntactic level).

Extant studies have evidenced massive convergence of BJS towards BG at the phonetic-phonological level, see, e.g., Gabriel & Kireva (2014), Gabriel & Grünke (2018), Grünke et al. (2023), and Sabev (accepted) on unstressed vowel reduction and speech rhythm, Andreeva et al. (2019; 2021) on the repertoire of pitch accents and boundary tones, and Grünke et al. (2023) on calling contours. The present contribution aims to deepen previous analyses into BJS prosody by investigating stress placement and syllabic prominence in comparative structures, pre-verbal negation-clitic sequences, and relative structures based on a new set of semi-spontaneous data recorded from 16 BJS–BG bilingual speakers (9 males), 14 monolingual speakers of BG (3 males), and 6 monolingual speakers of Spanish (3 males) in 2022–2023 using a dialogue play including these structures. A perceptual judgement analysis of the target items (approx. 500) carried out by four trained phoneticians (interrater agreement: $\kappa = 0.694$) shows that BJS tends to follow (monolingual and bilingual) BG in realizing main stress on the comparative particle or the intensifier instead of the adjective (e.g., BJS *MAS fuerte*, BG *PO-silen* vs. Sp. *más FUERte* ‘strong-er’; BJS *MUY ermozo*, BG *MNOgo hubavo* vs. Sp. *muy boNito* ‘very nice’) but does not move stress from the negation particle to following object clitics as in BG (BJS *NO lo vimos*, Sp. *NO lo vimos* vs. BG *ne GO vidjahme* ‘we didn’t see him’). While the negation-clitic sequences merely spell out grammatical features, the other constructions also involve semantic/pragmatic components. For example, they may not only be used to convey emphasis but

can also bear (contrastive) focus as in BJS *Penso ke es muy ermo-za, ama tambien muy* [_F *chika*] ‘I think it is very nice, but also very small’. Therefore, the result of the present study also has theoretical implications for the modeling of language contact and contributes to a better understanding of cross-linguistic influence. More particularly, it suggests that core-grammatical structures like negation-clitic sequences that merely spell out formal features are more stable and less susceptible to contact-driven prosodic change as compared to constructions that also involve an information-structural component such as comparative and relative constructions. Furthermore, it supports the Interface Hypothesis according to which external interfaces are more vulnerable and instable in language contact (Sorace 2011), whereas structures and patterns that do not involve such interfaces are expected to be more stable. However, even though these predictions are largely born out in the study, some single instances of stressed clitics as well as metalinguistic comments by the speakers suggest that language contact can ultimately do away also with the interface constraint.

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