

Ladino

INTRODUCTION

In our [Environmental Justice resource](#), we look at the vital role that languages play in ensuring that heritage, knowledge and understanding are transmitted across people with different cultures and preserved over the generations. Unfortunately, hundreds of the world's estimated 7,000 languages will become extinct over the next decades and the reasons for that include genocide, education policy and persecution as well as other economic or cultural reasons (elaalliance.org). This is obviously concerning because hand-in-hand with the disappearance of these languages goes an immense wealth of human knowledge, experience and creativity that has accumulated over thousands of years and this has serious implications for how we understand and interact with each other, our shared histories and our natural world.

Languages that are at risk of disappearing are sometimes referred to as 'endangered languages'. This resource focuses on one such language: Ladino.

RESEARCH TASKS

[Follow this link](#) to a list of official languages collated by Wikipedia.

Are you familiar with any lesser-known or less-spoken languages that aren't included on this list? Do you speak any? Share your experiences with your classmates, teacher, family or friends.

To find out about other endangered languages, explore the [Endangered Language Alliance website](#).

THE ORIGINS OF LADINO

The Ladino language is actually known by many different names including Judeo-Spanish, Judezmo, Muestro Spanyol, Djudyo, Jargon and Haketia. For a better understanding about why Ladino has come to have so many names, we should look at the origins of the language and how it developed.

Ladino derives from Old Spanish and so, like Spanish, it is a Romance language, which means that it originates from Latin, the language spoken by the Roman Empire.

Can you name any other Romance languages in addition to Spanish and Ladino? Some examples are below.

Romanian, Portuguese, French, Italian

Ladino was spoken by the Jews of Spain (the Sephardim), who, following their expulsion from Spain in 1492, travelled to a wide range of places including England, France and Holland. However, the language was particularly maintained and developed by the Sephardim, who went to Morocco and the Ottoman

Empire (modern Türkiye). Due to the Jewish diaspora*, Ladino has influences from Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French and Italian as well as other languages, depending on the location of the speakers.

Diaspora is a term that refers to a group of people who have spread from one original country to other countries (*Cambridge Dictionary*).

Do you know of any other diasporas?

Reflective task:

In our [Arabic culture in Spain resource](#), we looked at the influence of the Arabic language on the Spanish language, and at the history of Spain which explained this. Do you know any other languages that have been influenced by another language? What are the reasons for this?

A GLIMPSE AT JEWISH HISTORY IN SPAIN

Jewish history in Spain dates back to the Roman times. During the period of Islamic rule in Spain, Jews were not afforded equal rights with Muslims, but they were granted a protected status and experienced success and prosperity. Spain was considered to be the centre of the Jewish world in Europe as there were many Jews occupying prominent positions in society, particularly at the forefront of great scientific and cultural innovation. Read about some key figures below:



Name: Moses ben Maimon
Also known as: Ben Maimonides and Moshe ben Maimon
Lived: c. 1135–1204
Born in: Córdoba
Best known for: philosophy and Aristotelianism



Name: Judah Halevi
Also known as: Yehuda Halevi
Lived: c. 1075–1141
Born in: Toledo
Best known for: philosophy and poetry (published over 100 poems)



Name: Solomon ibn Gabirol
Also known as: Solomon ben Judah
Lived: c. 1021–1070
Born in: Málaga
Best known for: philosophy and poetry



Name: Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra
Also known as: Abenezra and Ibn Ezra
Lived: c. 1089–1167
Born in: Zaragoza
Best known for: Biblical commentary and philosophy

During the time of Christian reconquest which followed the Islamic rule in Spain, Jews were increasingly persecuted. They were forced to live in ghettos* (*juderías*) and banned from taking part in society: for example, they were not allowed to have conversations or eat and drink with Christians, practice medicine, hold positions of public office or even sell commodities such as bread, flour, meat. Consequently, Jews in Spain were reduced to extreme poverty and suffering.

*A ghetto is an area of a city, especially a very poor area, where people of a particular race or religion live closely together and apart from other people; a part of society or group that is in some way divided from the main part. (*Cambridge Dictionary*)

Reflective task:

Which other periods of history do you know about during which Jews were forced to live in ghettos? Do you know about other groups who have or are still forced to live in ghettos? Share your responses with your classmates.

This period of persecution culminated in one of the worst displays of antisemitism and violence against Jews in Spain (the massacre or pogrom* of 1391) and, later, in their expulsion from the country in 1492.

Sephardic Jews relocated all over the world. The globe gives some translations of 'Sephardi' in different languages:

*A pogrom is an organised massacre of a particular ethnic group and is mostly commonly used to describe the 19th- and 20th-century attacks on Jews within the Russian Empire.



Language challenge:

Which languages or scripts do you recognise from the globe? A list is given below:

Hebrew, Tiberian,
Spanish, Portuguese,
Catalan, Aragonese,
Basque, French, Galician,
Italian, Greek, Serbian,
Arabic

In 2015, the Spanish government passed a law which acknowledged the descendants of Jews expelled in 1492 and granted citizenship to those who were able to prove their Spanish heritage. Visitors to modern-day Spain can follow the so-called 'paths of Sepharad'. This route maps Jewish heritage across the country. Monuments along the path include the following:

Santa María La Blanca synagogue in Toledo:
Explore a 360-degree
tour of the synagogue



Emblems noting
the Jewish
Quarter of
Toledo, Spain



Symbol shaped like the
Iberian Peninsula,
embedded in the
streets to mark the
Jewish Quarter in
Cordoba, Spain.
The symbol is
the Hebrew word
Sepharad, which
refers to the Iberian
Peninsula.



Old staircase in the
Jewish Quarter of
Girona, Catalonia, Spain



© shutterstock

Research task:

Follow these links to find out about some important monuments that can be found along the paths of Sepharad:

[Sephardic Museum and the Tránsito Synagogue](#)

[Museum in Segovia](#)

[Jewish Quarter and synagogue in Córdoba](#)

Label the map of Spain with the some of the places of interest along the paths of Sepharad.



THE LADINO LANGUAGE

Spoken Ladino

While Ladino and Spanish languages sound quite similar (Spanish learners and speakers will recognise a great deal of Ladino), there are some key differences in terms of pronunciation and they are distinct languages due to the different historical influences.

[Follow this link](#) to listen to a native Ladino speaker from Rhodes, Stella Levi. In this recording, Stella describes her childhood in Rhodes and then the destruction of the ancient Sephardic community during the Holocaust.

SPANISH LANGUAGE TASK 1

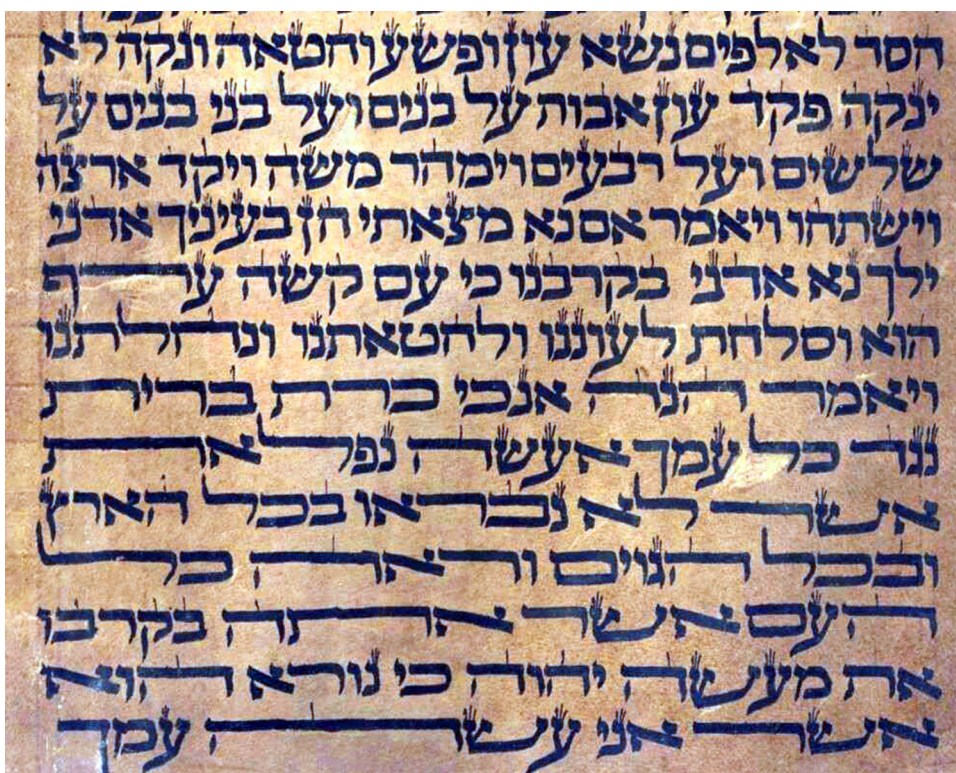
Can you spot any Spanish-Ladino cognates (i.e. words that sound and mean the same)?

Which words have a different pronunciation from the Spanish pronunciation?

Do you recognise any Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French, Italian or other language influences?

WRITTEN LADINO

Traditionally, Ladino was written in Rashi or Hebrew scripts. Here is an example of these scripts:



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Modern Ladino tends to be written in a phonetic Latin script, as in the subtitles for the YouTube link above.

SPANISH LANGUAGE TASK 2

Follow the YouTube link above again and, this time, focus on the subtitles.

What are the similarities or differences in the spelling of Ladino and the Spanish that you know? Can you find any patterns? For example, *komo* instead of *como* and *ke* instead of *que*.

AN ENDANGERED LANGUAGE

The majority of Ladino speakers were killed in the Holocaust. Of the Ladino speakers who survived, many were subsequently uprooted from their countries (for example, Bulgaria, Turkey and Morocco), relocating to other countries and adopting other languages such as Hebrew.

Some estimates suggest that there are as few as 51,000 Ladino speakers alive, though there is divergence over the exact number. The majority speakers are over the age of 60 and now live in Israel and Turkey.

LADINO REVIVAL

Faced with language extinction, there has been a renewed interest in recent times in the teaching and learning of Ladino. The Penn Language Centre at the University of Pennsylvania (USA) teaches a course in Judeo-Spanish, for example.

Research task:

[Follow this link](#) to the University of Pennsylvania and find out which other languages are offered by the Penn Language Centre.

Listen to some Ladino music artists and share your own responses to their music. [Follow this link](#) to find out about where the artists live and which other languages they speak.

LADINO SAYINGS

Common phrases or sayings in any language are an important way of conveying our feelings and they carry meaning about our culture.

Read these Ladino sayings:

“Las anyadas non azen sezudos, eyas non azen ke viejos”

“The years don’t make people wise, they just make them old.”

“Todos los dedos de la mano no son uno”

“All the fingers of the hand are not the same”

(Source: [Frances Johnson: 14 Ladino Phrases Every Jew Should Know – Hey Alma](#))

Reflective task:

What are your responses to these sayings? Which sayings are there in your own language(s)? Are they easy to translate to another language do you think? Why (not)?

CREATIVE TASK

Many bilingual and multilingual speakers will have an experience of the different languages that they speak, interacting with one another in different ways depending upon the situation and to whom they are speaking. Many people will speak to their parents and elders in one form of a language that is different from the language that they use with their siblings and peers.

Create a short dialogue which combines at least two languages that you know. These might be the languages that you are learning at school, plus English, or the languages you speak outside of school or at home. One approach could be to write the dialogue in one language (e.g. English) in the first instance and then go through and pick out some key words to translate into the other language(s). Give your language combination a name!

FURTHER RESEARCH:

Find out more about endangered languages: [Endangered Language Alliance](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lisa Panford is a Senior Lecturer at St Mary's University in Twickenham, with over 14 years' experience teaching languages in secondary schools in London. She has studied and worked in Spain and Peru. Lisa is passionate about counteracting discriminatory practices in the secondary MFL classroom and is dedicated to the principle that all pupils should be given an opportunity to appreciate the enriching and transformative experience of studying languages. Lisa is the co-founder of the [Decolonising Secondary MFL Curriculum](#) Special Interest Group, elected Member of the Council for the Association for Language Learning and a Member of the Advisory Panels at the Institute of Languages, Cultures and Societies and the British Academy.

Explore the rest of our resources on [diversity and inclusion](#).

