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# The (Not-So) Distant Relation between Spanish and Arabic

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper reviews the outcomes of linguistic contact between the Spanish and Arabic languages from the fifteenth century until the present day. While much is known about the relation between these two languages during the period 711–1492, the current scope of investigation explores the variants produced by such contact. This study reviews the distinct cases of language contact in Ceuta and Melilla, as well as the Moroccan Judeo-Spanish vernacular of the Sephardim, Haketia, which developed in cities such as Tetuan and Tangier.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Spanish, Arabic, Morocco, Ceuta, Melilla, Sephardim, Haketia*

1. **INTRODUCTION.** While a great deal is known about the influence of Arabic on the Spanish language during the period of 711–1492, much less is known about how these two languages have been in contact throughout the centuries that follow. It has only been in recent years that researchers have started to advance this field (Tilmatine and García 2011). As such, this study explores the contemporary linguistic development of both of these languages in the geographical proximities of Spain and Morocco and addresses outcomes of contact between them. As a point of reference, we will use four cities in Northern Morocco: Ceuta, Melilla, Tetuan and Tangier. First we will take a look at the unique situation of bilingualism and languages in contact. Next, we will analyze their political nomenclatures. Finally, we will conclude with a discussion on how these linguistic factors have an effect on both the Spanish and Arabic languages.

2. **THE CASES OF CEUTA AND MELILLA.** Sayahi (2011) notes that, ‘from early on, and prior to reaching the high point of the Latin American colonial enterprise, Spain’s colonial aspirations were directed toward what they called LA BERBERÍA, that is, the regions of land pertaining to the

Berbers (474). Five years after the re-conquest of Granada, the Spanish occupied Melilla in 1497, while the city of Ceuta was annexed from the Portuguese in 1668. Today, the political nomenclature of these regions can be understood by the status of autonomous cities. While the Mediterranean Sea separates Spain from Ceuta and Melilla, both cities are considered self-governing regions of Spain, without belonging to any other autonomous community. Ceuta is located 15 miles from mainland Spain while Melilla is further east and geographically much closer to Moroccan cities than Spanish ones. As both of these Spanish cities neighbor and border Moroccan territory, they demonstrate a unique linguistic situation. While Ceuta and Melilla have relatively similar populations, each at slightly over 70,000, they have very distinct situations of diglossia. In Ceuta, 50% of the population is of Peninsular origin, while the other half comes from a Moroccan background. Bilingualism, however, only affects those of Moroccan descent. That is to say, those living in Ceuta who are of Peninsular origin remain monolingual Spanish speakers. Education is entirely in Spanish, and Arabic does not have any official status.

Meanwhile, Melilla is composed of a population representing 60% Peninsular origin and 40% Berber origin. The Berber language was the indigenous tongue of Morocco before the Arab conquest in Northern Africa toward the end of the seventh century, in 670 (Tilmatine y García 2011:7). In contrast to Ceuta, Spanish is in contact more with Berber than with Arabic. Trilingualism, nevertheless, is common among those Berber descendants in Melilla who establish contact between the Spanish, Arabic and Berber languages. Similar to Ceuta, the Peninsular originating population remains monolingual, education is strictly in Spanish, and Berber does not have any official status.

Arabic and Berber are considered ethnic languages and are preserved in both Ceuta and Melilla due to immigration and contact with neighboring Moroccan cities that also speak these languages. Spanish, on the other hand, remains the official language of both regions, remaining the High variety of language. This extended diglossic situation is representative in Ceuta and Melilla, as multilingualism is used in their appropriate domains throughout these regions.

3. **SPANISH AND ARABIC IN CONTACT.** Despite their control over the regions of Ceuta and Melilla, Spain had additional interests in the lands of Northern Africa and continued to pursue the acquisition of territory.

Negotiations between Spain and France ensued to create Protectorates in Morocco between the years of 1912 and 1956, with Spain taking control of zones within Northern Morocco while the French extended their authority over the rest of the country (Sayahi 2011: 475).

The Spanish Protectorate in Northern Morocco, however, failed to implement language policies, as did the French during the French protectorate of the same time. Education during this period was based on and categorized into ethno-religious groupings: las escuelas-españolas, las escuelas hispano-israelitas and las escuelas hispano-musulmanas. Nevertheless, in the Spanish zones, Arabic was always to remain the predominate language of instruction. The Spanish zone was significantly smaller than the French one (see figure 1 below). While the French saw language as a tool of assimilation to form an elite class, and thus introduced the language in schooling, the Spanish did not implement strategic language policies. Sayahi (2011) notes that Spanish was only perceived as valuable if accompanied by knowledge of French (478).



FIGURE 1. By Cradel (Image:Maroc sans cadre.svg) [GDFL, CC-BY-SA-3.0], via Wikimedia Commons from Wikimedia Commons, [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AMorocco\\_Protectorate.svg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AMorocco_Protectorate.svg).

The Moroccan dialect of Arabic, *DARIJA*, is often referred to by other Arabic-speaking communities as the most varied or distant, particularly due to centuries of contact with Berber and the socioeconomic and

political role of the French language during its years of colonization. The interaction of language hierarchy in Morocco, especially regarding gender, complements the complex linguistic situation among the Moroccans. Sadiqi (2006) notes that, ‘multilingualism interacts significantly with ethnicity, gender, class and educational opportunities’ (7). She posits the linguistic variation between illiterate and educated women in Morocco, the former using Moroccan Arabic, Berber and the latter using Standard Arabic or French as well as their mother tongues. Such socio-linguistic elements are essential to take into account in order to fully understand the linguistic situation of postcolonial Morocco.

In greater Northern Morocco, 2,826 Moroccan-born Spaniards still reside in Morocco, representing 49% of Spaniards in the country (Sayahi 2011b). However, it is not only the small population of Spaniards in Morocco that carry on the language. Non-natives with varied competences in Spanish can be found throughout Morocco, primarily through schooling. Spanish is offered in 42% of Moroccan high schools. Importance, therefore, is placed on the Spanish language, often due to naturalistic acquisition such as in the media and neighboring areas (Sayahi 2011). Therefore, the overall number of speakers in Morocco is actually increasing, with the acquisition type chiefly geared towards second language learning. Arabic is said to influence Spanish, as seen primarily in loanwords today. Tilmatine and García (2011) note that the area of contact that has most influenced the Spanish language may be found at the first natural step of language contact, the lexical level, with some phonological variations based on the Moroccan dialect (10).

The Spanish spoken in Ceuta, Melilla, and other parts of Northern Morocco is representative of contact between Arabic and Spanish. Common use of interjection as discourse markers including *walou* (nothing), *inchalá* (G-d willing) and *safi* (okay) are dispersed in everyday conversation. Words particular to Moroccan culture, be it from the *DARIJA* Arabic dialect or the *CHERJA* Berber dialect, are also frequent.

At the phonemic level, Arabic-dominant speakers have most difficulty with the vowel system of Spanish. The limited vowel inventory of Arabic allows for free allophonic variation between /o/ and /u/ on the one hand (*cocina* > /kozina/ yet *fruta* > /frota/) and /e/ and /i/ on the other (*material* > /matirial/ yet *capitán* > /kapetan/), depending on the surrounding consonants. Raising /e/ to [i] in unstressed syllables (*triple* > /tripli/ and /o/ to [u] in final position (*granito* > /granitu/)

is common. Other features such as initial vowel deletion (*espía* > *spia*, *iglesia* > *glisia*), as well as non-stressed vowel shortening, are also commonplace (Sayahi 2011b: 93).

4. **THE SEPHARDIC CONNECTION.** The present section explores the linguistic development of the Jews of Iberian origin, the Sephardim. Upon being expelled from Spain, the Sephardim could only take their culture and language with them into the various locations in which they settled. While many Sephardim relocated to various port cities within the former Ottoman Empire and the Balkans, great numbers travelled to cities in North Africa, particularly those in Morocco. The Sephardim established themselves throughout a number of cities within Morocco, mostly northern coastal ones such as Tetuan, Tangier, Alcazar, Larache, Arcila, and Chauen. The Sephardim also settled into Ceuta and Melilla. (Sisso-Raz 2010). These newly-entering Jews were known as the *MIGORASHIM*, the expelled ones. This group of Jews contrasts with the already native-indigenous Jews, the *TOSHABIM*, who resided in Morocco for centuries, speaking Arabic as well as Berber. Madkouri (2006) notes that ‘los migorashim tenían sus propias leyes y reglamentos comunitarios que diferían de los de los toshabim, así como su folklore y su literatura. De hecho, visto su pasado cultural andalusí, se consideraban en muchos aspectos superiores a los marroquíes’ (28). For this reason it is further noted that for the estranged migorashim, Spain would continue as their native land, often creating pronounced feelings of nostalgia for centuries to follow.

The Sephardim left the Iberian Peninsula speaking a language similar to that of the Ibero-Romance spoken by non-Jewish co-territorial communities. Such evolution of the Spanish language developed into Judeo-Spanish vernaculars, with influences from neighboring languages depending on the then newly established Sephardic community. The Judeo-Spanish variant of Northern Morocco is termed *HAKETIA*. The various Judeo-Spanish vernaculars have survived centuries after the expulsions. Only in the last century or so have they have experienced a major decrease in the number of speakers, to the point where only elder Sephardic communities demonstrate control over their respective dialects.

To explore the concept of a Jewish language, Chetrit (1985) notes that they are ‘primarily a function of their lexical structure, which is basically integrative, of the phonetic or morpho-phonological conservatism of their matrix, as well as of the sociohistorical and sociolinguistic

conditions of their formations' (261). In this case, the matrix of Haketia is that of the different variants of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century Ibero-Romance, alongside elements of Hebrew, Aramaic, and an adstratum of Moroccan Arabic embedded within, with a superstratum of other foreign languages. Such features described by Chetrit are part of a comprehensive literature on Jewish Languages.

While the migorashim developed Haketia upon settling into Morocco, they did so alongside the toshabim who already spoke a Judeo-Arabic variety. Chetrit notes that in cities like Fez, Mekues, Marrakech, Agadir, Safi, Tetuan, Larache, Alcazarquivir and Tangier, 'groups of Megorashim (expellees) continued to use Spanish for more than two centuries after their arrival in Morocco, while becoming integrated socioeconomically with indigenous Judeo-Arabic speaking communities or toshabim' (266). Along with this co-ethnic habitation, the Jewish populations were often bilingual in Haketia in addition to their Judeo-Moroccan (Arabic) vernacular.

The politics and protectorates within Morocco over the centuries have also facilitated great evolution and changes in what became known as Haketia. The first French institution, L'Alliance Israélite Universelle, came to Tetuan in 1862 in an attempt to modernize the Jews of Moroccan cities. The French language, in this manner, was imposed upon the Sephardim (as well as non-Sephardim in Morocco), as daily instruction was conducted in French. From this, we are able to see the leading role of the French language not only in the south of Morocco as predicted by France's Protectorate, but also within the northern regions as well.

The minutes of the Jewish Community of Tangier, referred to as *Las Actas*, provide evidence of the linguistic evolution in this city between the years 1860–1883. These minutes recorded all doings within 'la comunidad hebrea de Tánger.' Recently, transcriptions have been published in Latin characters of the protocols and minutes of the meetings that took place between 1860–1883, selected from the committee of the Jewish community in Tangier (Pimienta 2011). Minutes were recorded in *Solitreo*, the cursive form of Rashi script, an alphabet unique to the Judeo-Spanish language.

The year 1860 is not coincidental, however, in being selected as the starting point for *Las Actas*. Sephiha (2012) has alluded to what can be two distinct periods with regards to the transformation of Haketia.

The first period is that of 1492 until 1860, in which certain continuity could be found from medieval Spanish, with a great influence of Hebrew and Arabic integration. The second period is what may have started by 1860 until the forfeiture of Haketia as a primary means of communication. This period is marked by the Spanish occupation of Tetuan as the Hispano-Moroccan War, or *LA GUERRA DE ÁFRICA*, from 1859–1860, a war that began due to Moroccan upheaval over the Spanish zones of Ceuta and Melilla. The goals of this war from the Moroccan perspective were to gain control over Ceuta and Melilla, while the goals of Spain were to gain control of Tangier and Tetuan, frequently referred to as *LA TOMA DE TETUAN*. The Wad-Ras treaty in late April of 1860 brought an end to the war, with Spain as the ultimate victor.

From this critical point, Haketia went through a period of rehispanization. As Haketia developed into a distinct vernacular from medieval Spanish by incorporating lexical and phonetic elements, the process of rehispanization slowly transformed this language into one much more similar to that of Modern Castilian (Madkouri 2006: 28). The establishment of Spanish and French Protectorates in 1912 is thought to be an additional turning point for the dissolution of Haketia. Despite this somewhat limited lifecycle of Moroccan-Judeo-Spanish, remnants of the language are still present at varying degrees in the linguistic repertoires of Sephardim of Moroccan origin who now reside outside of the country.

5. **CONCLUSION.** These unique situations of contact represent the distinct linguistic repertoires found throughout Northern Morocco. While the influence of Arabic on the Spanish language has been the focus of this paper, the greater linguistic strata of Berber, Hebrew and French must be taken into account to properly construct the sociolinguistic environment throughout Ceuta, Melilla, Tetuan, and Tangier. These variants of language, and their degrees of contact, are unique between the self-autonomous regions of Ceuta and Melilla, and the Judeo-Spanish vernaculars of the Sephardim. However, the political role of Spain in Northern Morocco over the past half-millennia, be it the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, the War of Africa of 1860, or the start of the Protectorate in 1912, establishes a link between the linguistic development and practices in these cities today. Such distinct situations putting speakers of Spanish and Arabic in contact with one another and thus, producing linguistic shift, bilingualism and exchange, exemplify the continued degree of contact in the centuries that follow the medieval period.



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