



Challenges and needs in Ladino teaching among ten language revitalisation activists

Desafíos y necesidades en la enseñanza del ladino entre diez activistas de la revitalización de la lengua

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Abstract

This article presents results from interviews with ten teachers engaged in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) revitalisation. The purpose of the study is to collect Ladino teachers' experiences to understand the challenges they face and the needs they express to continue their activities.

Challenges were related to students' linguistic backgrounds, students' and teachers' confidence about expressing themselves in Ladino, and to views on language normativity. The teachers expressed needs concerning finding stable teacher positions, about creating a Ladino proficiency test and certificate, developing resources for language teaching, and updating Ladino's vocabulary to reflect contemporary life. Creating venues for learners to use the language, and opportunities for Ladino teachers to meet and discuss pedagogical issues were seen as important.

The teachers' views differed considerably regarding questions on language norms, and the need for an official language certificate. The results point to the need for further discussions, and for teacher development initiatives.

Keywords: Ladino; Judeo-Spanish; language revitalisation; language teaching; Sephardic studies; Jewish languages.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de entrevistas con diez profesores comprometidos con la revitalización del ladino (judeoespañol). El propósito del estudio es recopilar las experiencias de docentes de ladino para comprender los desafíos que enfrentan y las necesidades que expresan para continuar con sus actividades.

Los desafíos estaban relacionados con el perfil lingüístico de los estudiantes, con la confianza de los estudiantes y de los profesores para expresarse en ladino y con opiniones normativas sobre la lengua. Los maestros expresaron necesidades relacionadas con la búsqueda de puestos docentes estables, con la creación de una prueba y un certificado de dominio del ladino, con el desarrollo de recursos para la enseñanza del idioma y con la actualización del vocabulario del ladino para reflejar la vida contemporánea. Se consideró importante crear espacios para que los estudiantes puedan practicar la lengua y oportunidades para que los docentes se puedan reunir y discutir cuestiones didácticas.

Los puntos de vista de los docentes diferían considerablemente en cuanto a normas lingüísticas, y la deseabilidad de un certificado oficial de dominio del idioma. Los resultados apuntan a la necesidad de más discusiones y de iniciativas de perfeccionamiento pedagógico.

Palabras clave: Ladino; judeoespañol; revitalización lingüística; enseñanza de lenguas, estudios sefardíes; lenguas judías.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. A personal note from the author

During the Covid19 lockdown in 2020, I stumbled upon an advertisement for an online Ladino course. I am trained as a Romance language teacher and linguist, and at the time, I was finishing my Ph.D. dissertation on aspects of teaching Spanish as a foreign language in Sweden. I remembered having read about Ladino and being fascinated by the language, but I did not really know that people around the world still spoke it. I was intrigued by the chance to learn it myself, and I applied for the course. What I met was a vibrant, vivid, and very welcoming community of speakers, many of whom were deeply engaged in saving their language, and in opening their culture to new-comers.

As a researcher in applied linguistics and educational sciences, I currently focus on issues regarding minority language teaching and revitalisation. I consider teaching – in the widest possible use of the term – to be an integral part of language revitalisation. During my own Ladino studies, I found that little had been written on Ladino teaching. When a research funding was made available in 2022 by the Centre for Language and Literature Education of Karlstad University, I decided to make a contribution to the field. The present article is, thus, my humble attempt to further the investigation on Ladino teaching and revitalisation, and, at the same time, to give something back to the community of teachers and speakers who shared their language and culture with me.

1.2. Ladino – a brief description

Ladino, also known as *Djudeo-Espanyol*, *Djudezmo*, *Judaeo-Spanish*, and other glottonyms¹ (cf. August-Zarębska, 2020; Bunis, 2018), is the language of the descendants of the Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 and, shortly after, from Portugal (for an historical overview, see Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2000). A majority of the exiled Sephardim eventually settled in the Ottoman Empire, where sultan Bayezid II welcomed the new subjects and, no doubt, the skills and economic assets they would bring (Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2000). Based on late medieval Castilian Spanish and other Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula, Ladino has retained many archaic traits, especially regarding pronunciation, but it has also developed its own lexical and morphosyntactic characteristics, mixed with a substantial

¹ The teachers who were interviewed for the present study preferred different names for the language, generally opting either for *Ladino* or *Djudeo-Espanyol*, i.e., Judaeo-Spanish. In this article, *Ladino* will primarily be used to denote the language, except for quotes where interviewees chose other terms.

number of borrowings from Hebrew, Turkish, Greek, French, and others. The language has several dialects in different areas where it is or has been spoken (Bunis, 2018). There are two official institutions who work for the preservation of the language: the Israeli-based *Autoridad Nacionala del Ladino*, founded in 1996, and the *Akademia Nacionala del Ladino*, established in 2019 and affiliated with the Royal Spanish Academy. Alongside these institutions, many less official organisations, and a large number of grassroots activists strive to revive the language.

Ladino was traditionally written in Hebrew characters. In printed texts, the semi-cursive Rashi font was usually used, but texts can also be found in Hebrew square letters, *Meruba*.² For handwriting, the cursive *Solitreo* script was commonly employed. Latin script became increasingly more common after the Turkish spelling reform of 1928 (August-Zarębska, 2020; Bunis, 2019). Today, Latin script is commonly used in Ladino publications, generally using the orthographic rules adopted by *Aki Yerushalayim*, one of few remaining Ladino language magazines (cf. Varol, 2002).

Due to the devastating consequences of the Second World War (see, for instance, Mazower, 2006, and Naar, 2016, on the devastation of the Sephardic community of Salonica), but also to such circumstances as Turkish-only language policies in the 1930s and 1940s (Gerson Şarhon, 2011) or the social prestige of the Hebrew language in Israel (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999; Zuckermann, 2020), resulting in strong tendencies within the post-war generations to switch to other, majority languages such as Turkish, Greek, Hebrew, Castilian Spanish, or English, the survival of Ladino is imperilled (Bunis, 2018; Moseley, 2010). Relatively few fluent mother-tongue speakers remain, and Ladino is now primarily spoken in family and in religious contexts (Kirschen, 2019), which entails that the language generally is not used outside quite limited settings.

The exact number of Ladino speakers in the world is unknown, and estimates vary considerably. Harris (2011), who perhaps states the most cautious figures, calculated that only around 11 000 speakers of varying proficiency levels remained in 2009, and that many of them did no longer speak the language fluently but, rather, remembered isolated words and sayings from their childhood, without using the language as an everyday vernacular. Other sources mention larger numbers of speakers, for instance Ethnologue (2023), who classes Ladino as an endangered language counting between 10 000 and one million mother tongue speakers.

² The last recurrent publication using Rashi script was the Salonica-based newspaper *El Mesajero*, which was forcibly closed down in 1941 by the German occupants in Greece (Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2000). The last publication in Ladino printed in Meruba characters was the New York-based *La Vara*, published between 1922 and 1948 (Bürki, 2010).

Ladino's dire situation is aggravated by the fact that the majority of the remaining native speakers are in their sixties or older (Gerson Şarhon, 2011; Harris, 2011), and by the fact that the language is rarely passed on to younger generations (Harris, 1994; 2011). Indeed, we may today see the last generation of native Ladino-speakers (FitzMorris, 2014), and the language may face extinction if no new speakers are created. Despite this alarming situation, Ladino has been less researched than other Romance languages originating in the Iberian Peninsula, and less than other Jewish languages. Furthermore, there are, hitherto, effectively no studies on Ladino learning or teaching. Therefore, relatively little is known about how teachers teach Ladino, what resources they use, what they think about their teaching efforts, what challenges they encounter in their teaching, and what they need to keep up their language revitalisation activities.

2. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study gathers the experiences of ten activists involved in promoting Ladino learning and Ladino language revitalisation. In this article, language teaching is seen as an essential part of language revitalisation. Furthermore, teaching is understood as any activity, great or small, undertaken with the intention that another person shall learn some part of the language, be it vocabulary, grammar, syntax, pronunciation, writing skills, et cetera.

The purpose of the study is to collect these experiences in order to understand better the challenges that Ladino teachers encounter in their language revitalisation efforts and the needs they express to continue their activities.

The following research questions are asked:

- 1) What major challenges do Ladino teachers see in their current Ladino teaching activities?
- 2) What needs do Ladino teachers see for future Ladino teaching and revitalisation?

3. METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

The researcher contacted 15 Ladino activists who – in different ways and in different contexts – promote the language by engaging in teaching activities, and in creating resources for learning Ladino. Some of them were trained as teachers (in other languages, or in different subjects), whereas others had no formal teacher training. For the sake of simplicity, they will all henceforth be referred to as “teachers”.

Eleven out of the fifteen contacted teachers agreed to participate in the study. Due to unforeseen events, one of the intended interviews did not take place, and all in all ten participants were interviewed: five women and five men, of different ages, based in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. To secure their anonymity throughout the article, they will be referred to as Teacher 1 to Teacher 10. Among the ten teachers were speakers of Ladino as a mother tongue or heritage language, with Sephardic family backgrounds, as well as others that may be described as “new speakers”³ of Ladino, that is to say, (predominantly younger) activists without any Sephardic origin, who have learned Ladino as a foreign language as adults.⁴ The teachers are presented briefly below in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of participating teachers.

PARTICIPANT	SPEAKER STATUS
Teacher 1	mother tongue/heritage language speaker
Teacher 2	mother tongue/heritage language speaker
Teacher 3	mother tongue/heritage language speaker
Teacher 4	mother tongue/heritage language speaker
Teacher 5	new speaker
Teacher 6	mother tongue/heritage language speaker
Teacher 7	mother tongue/heritage language speaker
Teacher 8	new speaker
Teacher 9	new speaker
Teacher 10	new speaker

Teachers 1–9 had all gained considerable experience of teaching Ladino and of other activities aimed at revitalising Sephardic language and/or culture. They taught or had until recently taught at universities, and/or in privately arranged courses in formal as well as informal settings (i.e., in regularly arranged classes or in less official contexts). Teacher 10 had limited experiences of teaching Ladino to high-school pupils at the time of the interview, but was planning to implement a university programme of Sephardic studies.

³ For a discussion on the concept of *new speakers*, see Hodges (2021).

⁴ The participants were not asked about their family backgrounds or about being/not being of Sephardic origin, but all commented upon it when talking about how they began teaching Ladino. To reduce the possibilities to identify the participants, considering the small number of Ladino teachers world-wide, the description of the participants is kept vague on purpose, and further information about the participants' backgrounds, what languages they use in their classes besides Ladino, their professions or other activities outside Ladino teaching will not be given in this article.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom, and recorded (sound only) with a Dictaphone. The interviews ranged between forty minutes and one hour and forty-five minutes, amounting to a total of approximately nine and a half hours of recorded data. The interviews were predominantly performed in Ladino, intertwined, when needed, with words in other languages that the interviewer and the interviewees had in common. Using Ladino as the main language was a choice based on the philosophy that the study should not only be a study *on* Ladino, but also *in* Ladino and *for* the Ladino speaking community, thus reinforcing the use of Ladino not only as an object of study but, indeed, also as a language *for* scientific study. The article, thus, is intended not only to serve academic purposes but also to support a pedagogical discourse within the Ladino-speaking community.

The recorded interviews were manually transcribed by the researcher. A qualitative content analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2016) of the transcriptions was performed. In this process, common topics that the interviewed teachers agreed upon, and topics that they did not agree upon, were crystallised. In the analysis, special attention was given to comments on challenges or difficulties, and to expressions of needs and wishes for future language revitalisation activities.

4. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND EARLIER STUDIES ON LADINO TEACHING

The present study contributes to the field of Sephardic studies by providing insights into Ladino teacher practices and views on language revitalisation. According to Olko and Sallabank (2021: 1), there has recently been an increase in “initiatives, both grassroots and top-down, to counteract the devastating loss of linguistic diversity and to promote multilingualism and the use of local languages”. This is certainly true when it comes to initiatives for Ladino, particularly from the onset of the Covid19 pandemic in 2020, when a large number of online activities for learning and using Ladino were created (for an overview of such activities, see Yebra López, 2021).

So far, though, the increase in language revitalisation activities has not entailed any significant increase in studies on Ladino teaching and learning. In earlier publications, Refael (2001) offers an overview of Ladino courses in Israel; Koén-Sarano (2001) gives an account of her experiences as a Ladino teacher, and Santa Puche (2001) describes a proposed outline for a course on Sephardic history and Ladino. More recently, Gerson Şarhon (2011) briefly describes what motivates young persons to learn Ladino in Turkey. These publications, however, do not focus on teachers’ needs for developing their teaching activities and provide few possibilities to compare different teachers’ experiences.

Language revitalisation may be realised in many different forms. Regardless of which activities or resources are utilised, revitalisation efforts must be implemented together with and in great respect for the language speakers themselves (Olko and Sallabank, 2021; Zuckermann, 2020, 2021). The present study was inspired by *Revivalistics* perspectives on research about language revitalisation, in line with Zuckermann (2020, 2021), and by advice on language revitalisation outlined in Olko and Sallabank (2021), and in Hinton (2010). Zuckermann (2020, 2021) states the importance of working *with* the community of speakers of a language, and Hinton (2010: 35) emphasises that “linguistic research must also serve the interests of the community whose language is being documented”. With this in mind, the researcher, who himself started learning Ladino in 2020, endeavoured to conduct the interviews in Ladino, thus involving the language itself in the study, rather than merely watching language practices from the outside.

Language revitalisation efforts may be more or less influenced by subconscious language ideologies or explicit language attitudes (Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby, 2021), shaping normative views on the language in question. One of the main ideologies regularly found among minority language speakers, according to Woolard (1998, cited in Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby, 2021: 107), is the “ideology of authenticity”, implying an expectation to use a certain language variety rather than any other, something that may cause problems for new speakers of a language. This idea is opposed to the “ideology of anonymity” (ibid.), suggesting that a language is open for all speakers, regardless of their origin and of how they have acquired their knowledge of the language. This ideology also implies the existence of a standardised language variety, more or less void of dialectal or local forms of expression.

Revitalisation efforts for Welsh and, in particular, for Hawai’ian are often mentioned as good examples, offering structured language learning possibilities for children at school through immersion programmes (for brief overviews, see Morgan, 2013; Wilson & Kamanā, 2013), in the case of Hawai’ian also involving pupils’ families and older, mother tongue speaking generations, in line with the so-called Mentor-Apprentice program designed by Hinton (e.g., 2001; Pine and Turin, 2017; Zuckermann, 2021). Progress has also been made with similar approaches to endangered regional languages such as Elfdalian in Sweden (Sapir, 2017), or Inari Saami in Finland (Helander et al., 2023).

However, as Olko and Sallaband (2021: 5; cf. Zuckermann, 2021) point out, providing school children with minority language lessons may also prove counterproductive if competent teachers and/or useful teaching resources cannot be found, something that is not always easy when it comes to less commonly taught languages, or languages with a small number of speakers. Ideally, mother tongue or heritage speakers of an endangered language

engaged in language revitalisation programmes would be trained in linguistics as well as in language teaching (Hinton, 2010), but this is often not the case. In addition to competent teachers, there is also a need for “user-friendly” resources such as grammars and dictionaries “accessible to lay communities” (Zuckermann, 2020: 243), and for young persons who can strengthen their language proficiency and become language custodians (Zuckermann, 2021).

Ladino is no longer – or to a very little extent – used as a vernacular in the homes and in the streets, a situation that is disadvantageous to the chances of survival or revitalisation of the language. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the language is a highly diasporic one, its speakers residing all over the world, and often without any Ladino-speaking community close by. However, some scholars have pointed out that such geographically-based communities may not be the only solution for a language to thrive and for language revitalisation to succeed, which is good news for a “post-co-territorial language” (Benor, 2008: 1070) such as Ladino. Indeed, online communities are seen as a new way to build linguistic communities where native and new speakers of the language and partakers of the culture can gather and form what Held (2010) calls a “Digital Home-Land” (cf. also Brink-Danan, 2010; Yebra López, 2021). Since 2020, Ladino has attracted an unknown number of learners of all ages (Cruz Çilli, 2021), many of whom partake in online activities for learning and/or for practicing the language.

The increase in language revitalisation activities since 2020 involves indeed the use of many online resources. In two of the few articles written on Ladino teaching and learning, Gerson Şarhon (2011) and Santa Puche (2001) write that if new generations of Ladino speakers are to be created (be it as native speakers, or as new speakers), Ladino learners need access to adequate educational resources. This may be a challenge for any language, especially for languages with few speakers, but, here too, the challenge for Ladino is increased by the diasporic character of the language. The fact that it is spoken by individual speakers all around the world, rather than in homogenous communities based on geography, and studied by new speakers with different mother tongues, may impede or significantly complicate the adaptation of language revitalisation models that have proven successful for other minority languages, such as language immersion programmes in pre-schools and schools (cf. Warschauer et al., 1997).

5. RESULTS: CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

This section of the article first offers a brief overview of the interviewed teachers’ activities. After this, results regarding research questions 1 and 2 are presented. Quotes in

Ladino are given as examples of topics mentioned by the interviewed teachers. The spelling conventions of *Aki Yerushalayim* (“Grafía del djudeo-espanyol sigún el metodo de Akí Yerushaláyim”, 2023) are used in the quotes. Some quotes are abbreviated to omit pauses, self-corrections, and repetitions. English translations are given in [brackets]. The results are further discussed in the final section of the article.

5.1. Teaching activities and resources

As noted above, there has been an increase in Ladino revitalisation efforts, especially in online settings, since 2020 (Cruz Çilli, 2021), and several of the interviewees, for instance Teachers 2, and 8, talked about a “renasimyento de la lingua” [a renaissance for the language]. Teacher 8 also stated: “kreo ke en algun momento, i puedeser no en syen anyos, ma presto, ke la djente va empesar a eskrivir i avlar de *este* momento” [I believe that at some point, and perhaps not in a hundred years, but soon, that people will start writing and talking about *this* moment], that is, he spoke of the current period as one of crucial importance for the language and its future survival. This feeling was also mirrored in Teacher 4, who talked about the growing interest in Ladino among students of all backgrounds, saying: “esta lingua tyene una atraksyon, no se deké” [this language has an attraction, I do not know why].

The ten interviewed teachers learned Ladino and started teaching it in different ways and for different reasons, but all expressed a strong love for the language. Teacher 8 said: “esta lingua me topó” [this language found me]; such feelings of discovery or rediscovery of a nearly lost language were expressed by several of the teachers, by heritage Ladino speakers as well as by teachers who had learnt the language as a foreign language. In many of the interviews, strong feelings of responsibility were also evident among the teachers. Again, this was clearly expressed by Teacher 8, who said: “malgrado ke no so sefaradí, kreigo ke tengo una responsabilitá de ayudar la djente ke keren ambezarsen la lingua, i yo la puedo ambezar” [even if I’m not a Sephardi myself, I think that I have got a responsibility towards the people who want to learn the language, and I am able to teach it].

The teachers presented a variety of teaching activities. Many produced their own teaching materials, (texts, web-sites, films, vocabulary lists, grammar explanations, and so forth), but also made use of previously published books, recordings, newspaper articles, et cetera, which they further adapted to use in their classes. For instance, Teacher 4 used her own translation to English of a previously published textbook written in Hebrew, and Teacher 6 let his students read historic articles in Ladino newspapers published in his hometown before the Second World War.

Five of the teachers (2, 3, 4, 5, and 8) also involved mother tongue Ladino speakers in their classes or in course assignments, or expressed a will to strive for increased contacts across generations between language learners and mother tongue speakers. Teacher 8 specifically mentioned language revitalisation models for Hawai'ian as an example to follow, with structures for allowing cross-generational language contacts. Activities like these were generally made possible thanks to digital resources.

Indeed, the vast majority of the teachers' activities were performed via online applications such as Zoom, FaceTime, and similar, but at least six of the teachers had also taught in-person classes at universities or at other, less formal institutions prior to the Covid19 pandemic. Digital resources such as Google groups, and WhatsApp groups were also used, and some of the teachers posted language learning resources in Facebook groups, on YouTube, Twitter, and similar platforms. Likewise, the *Ladinokomunita*⁵ e-mail group was mentioned as a language learning resource, as every message sent to the group is moderated, and sometimes commented, by a group of volunteering Ladino speakers. For instance, at intervals the group moderators admonish members to use the *Aki Yerushalayim* orthography (“*Grafía del djudeo-espanyol sigún el metodo de Akí Yerushaláyim*”, 2023), and inform them about these guidelines (e.g., *Las Reglas del Grupo*, *Ladinokomunita*, message #68987, 1st of September 2022).

The importance of the use of digital resources for Ladino revitalisation is reflected in the words of Teacher 9, who claimed that *online* revitalisation is essential for Ladino, as this is the only way to reach all of the speakers, due to Ladino's diasporic nature: “solamente un ambezamiento en linea puede ayegar a toda la djente ke lo avla” [only online teaching can reach everyone who speaks it]. This is in line with Yebra López' (2021) views on Sephardic online community building and Held's (2010) concept of a Digital Home-Land.

The number of students or participants in the teachers' activities ranged from a handful to, in one case, over 800 individuals. According to Teacher 2, there are few young learners who eventually become active Ladino speakers, a fact reflected also in Gerson Şarhon's (2011) survey of the situation for Ladino in Turkey. The majority of the other interviewees, however, seemed to have a greater age variety among their students. Teacher 9 described his students as “djente de todas partes del olam, i de todas las edades” [people from all over the world, and of all ages], specifying that he had had students from 15 to 96 years of age. As a rare exception, Teacher 10 had so far only introduced the language to high school pupils. A growing number of younger learners may, perhaps, reflect a change in attitudes during the last decade since Gerson Şarhon (2011) conducted her study, but it is too early to

⁵ See <https://ladinokomunita.groups.io/g/main>.

conclude whether a growing interest in the language will also lead to a sustained increase in active, younger speakers.

5.2. Challenges in Ladino teaching

Many of the challenges mentioned by the interviewed teachers regarded circumstances correlated to students and to students' previous knowledge of different languages. The very nature of Ladino itself and the teachers' differing views on language normativity provided further challenges, all of which influenced the teaching activities. Other challenges concerned the lack of updated teaching resources, such as textbooks, and the teachers' own experienced language proficiency, as well as their lack of professional development as language teachers. These challenges will be exemplified in the following subsections.

5.2.1. *Challenges related to students*

Seven teachers (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9) mentioned challenges in Ladino teaching related to their students. To one of them, Teacher 8, the challenges mainly consisted in managing large online groups in Zoom. Teachers 8 and 5 also mentioned that handling online studies via Zoom, WhatsApp and other digital applications can be difficult not only for teachers, but also for some students, especially in the older age groups who may not be used to such technologies. Teacher 5, however, herself being one of the elder participants in the study, declared that nothing is impossible, saying: "I yo puedo azer i estas kozas" [Even I can do these things too].

Generally, thus, managing teacher-student interaction in online applications was not seen as a big problem. The seven teachers mentioned above described that the complexity of their teaching activities was increased, rather, by the fact that students with mixed language backgrounds (different mother tongues and/or knowledge of additional languages, and with varying language proficiencies) partook in the same classes. Teacher 9 clarified that these difficulties are particularly noticeable in groups where only some of the students know Castilian Spanish, while others are familiar with the Hebrew language and/or orthography, a mix of student backgrounds that was common in his and in some of the other teachers' classes. Hebrew speaking students can more easily learn how to read Ladino written in Rashi script, whereas as Latin script may come easier for students with other linguistic backgrounds, such as Spanish or English.

Different language backgrounds among the students also affected teaching oral production. According to Teachers 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9, Ladino pronunciation is more difficult to master for Spanish speaking students than for students with other mother tongues,

presumably because Ladino and Spanish are typologically very similar, but differ in terms of spelling conventions and pronunciation. Teachers 1, 7, and 9 specifically mentioned the letters (pronounced [b]), <v> [v], <h> [x], <sh> [ʃ], and <j> [ʒ] as challenging for Castilian speakers.⁶ Teachers 5 and 9 had solved these issues by making separate classes for students who know (some) Castilian Spanish, and for students who do not. When teaching to read and write in Rashi script, similar strategies were sometimes adopted for students who do/do not know how to read Hebrew characters. Teacher 9 summarised these pedagogical choices by saying: “paradoksalmente kale azerlo diferente para ke el resultado seiga el mizmo” [paradoxically, one has to do things differently in order to get the same result].

5.2.2. *Challenges related to language anxiety and to feelings of belonging*

Teacher 5 mentioned that online discussion groups that she had organised herself before starting to teach formally, had helped her to gain linguistic confidence and to start talking, which was helpful for her to dare start teaching the language. Teaching Ladino may feel particularly daunting for a teacher who is not a mother tongue speaker. Indeed, initial feelings of apprehension towards teaching Ladino were a circumstance mentioned by Teachers 5 and 8, both new speakers of Ladino, but indeed also by Teacher 4, who grew up in a Ladino speaking family but who had not actively used the language for quite some time when she decided to start giving lessons, encouraged by an active Ladino mother tongue speaker.

Confidence about expressing oneself in Ladino is important not only for Ladino teachers or teachers-to-be, but also, of course, for prospective language learners. Fear of using a target language, or *language anxiety*, is a well-known phenomenon in foreign language learning, not only in face-to-face learning environments, but also in online settings (Russell, 2020; for an overview of research on language anxiety, see Toyama and Yamazaki, 2021). Such fears were mentioned by Teachers 3, 4, and 5. Insisting on the active use of Ladino in classes was emphasised by Teacher 4 as important in order to prevent students from using other languages to talk *about* Ladino, which would not develop their Ladino proficiency. Teachers 3, 4, and 5 also underscored the importance of making students with a low linguistic self-esteem feel part of the Ladino speaking community.

Becoming a part of the Ladino speaking community is important also for Ladino teachers. Teacher 5, who had learnt Ladino as a foreign language, expressed humility as

⁶ The pronunciation of these letters differs between Ladino and Castilian Spanish, Ladino having conserved the medieval pronunciation to a higher degree. In Castilian, the letters and <v> are both pronounced [b] or [β] depending on context; <h> is no longer pronounced; the [ʃ] and [ʒ] sounds, preserved in Ladino, have merged to [x] in modern Castilian.

regards the task of offering classes in Ladino, stating that she not only teaches it to others, but that she also learns from the experience; particularly so in classes where beginners mix with mother tongue/heritage speakers, which is not seldom the case. Teacher 7 said that he engages in activities specifically aimed at mother tongue or heritage speakers, hoping to be able to revitalise their language proficiency in order for them, in their turn, to help future speakers to gain a good, authentic Ladino proficiency, and for them to be able to train future Ladino teachers, a strategy recommended also by Hinton (2010). Teacher 5 mentioned similar thoughts and tried actively to mix heritage speakers hoping to regain their mother tongue with beginners in her classes.

Working with mother tongue or heritage speakers of Ladino was also mentioned by Teachers 4 and 8, who work actively to create “apprenticeships”, settings where Ladino learners can engage in online or offline conversations with older speakers of the language. One of these teachers, who himself is not a heritage speaker of Ladino (Teacher 8), said:

[Mi kolega] i yo podemos ambezar la lingua, somos profesores, [ma] no avlamos la lingua komo muestra lingua materna, i pensamos ke sería muy ermozo de mostrar a nuestros elevos ke *ay* djente ke avlan ... Mos da otra perspektiva, kreigo, sovre el uzo i la valor de la lingua. [[My colleague] and I, we can teach the language, we are teachers, [but] we don't speak the language as our mother tongue, and we think that it would be very beautiful to show to our students that *there are* people who speak it ... It gives us another perspective, I believe, of the use and the value of the language.]

The importance of connecting younger persons engaged in Ladino revitalisation with older generations of mother tongue speakers to help developing a genuine, oral proficiency was also mentioned by Teacher 2.

5.2.3. *Challenges related to the language itself and to views on language normativity*

Grenoble (2021: 11) argues that the fact that a certain language has a standardised form may be beneficial for producing textbooks and other written sources that can be used for language revitalisation, as well as for use in social media, chat messages and so forth. She underscores that this is not a requirement for language revitalisation, but that it may be helpful. The interviewed teachers showed different opinions regarding language norms and *what* Ladino to teach. Because Ladino is a diasporic language which has had several historical centres, the language has developed varieties differing in pronunciation, writing systems and orthography, as well as vocabulary.⁷

⁷ To this may be added *Ḥaketía*, the western branch of Sephardic Spanish historically spoken in today's Morocco. This sister language to Ladino was not discussed in the interviews.

As for orthography, the participants all said that the *Aki Yerushalayim* system (“Grafía del djudeo-espanyol sigún el metodo de Akí Yerushaláyim”, 2023) was preferable for writing Ladino with Latin script; views differed, however, about the use or non-use of accent marks. For some interviewees, such as Teacher 1, the use of accent marks was not a question they had thought about before the interviews. Teacher 1, a mother tongue Ladino speaker, thought that it would be difficult, also for mother tongue speakers, to learn the rules for when to use accents. However, she said that she encouraged her students to indicate the accentuation of new words, to learn the correct pronunciation: “Kuando tenesh menester de meter aksentos para akodrarvos, meteldo!” [When you need to place stress marks to remember, do it!]. Likewise, Teacher 2 said that accents are necessary in texts for students, especially if there are no sound recordings to listen to: “Para ambezar, kale meter los aksentos” [To learn, you have to place accents]. Teachers 1, 2, and 9 all thought that accents may be useful to distinguish between homographs, such as *gato* [‘cat’] and *gató* [‘cake’], or verb forms like *avlo* [‘I speak’] and *avló* [‘he/she spoke’]. However, whereas Teacher 9 wanted to restrict the use of accents to cases like these, stating that the language would be easier for beginners without having to learn where to use stress marks, Teacher 2 said that she had started to consider accents as ever more useful and necessary. These differences in opinion may constitute a challenge in Ladino teaching *per se*, as students take courses with different teachers and encounter diverse ways to write the language.

The to-be-or-not-to-be of accents is also a discussion seen in other Ladino contexts, for instance in the YouTube interview with Ladino activist Benni Aguado (Ladino21, 2022). Another example is Aldo Sevi, the chief editor of *Aki Yerushalayim*, who writes: “En mi opinión sería mejor si los ke eskrivimos en esta lingua empesemos a indikar los aksentos para ayudar a la djente ke se están ambezándola” [In my opinion, it would be better if we who write in this language start indicating the accents to help people who are learning it] (Sevi, 2023: 4). The latter opinion is particularly interesting, as the orthography of *Aki Yerushalayim* is often purported as normative for contemporary Ladino spelling (e.g., Varol, 2002), and this norm seems, perhaps, to be changing.⁸

Another challenge related to the teaching of orthography and written language norms concerned the use of Rashi and/or Solitreo. Among the interviewees, Teachers 5, 6, and 9 chose not only to teach Latin script, but also to include lessons on reading Ladino written in Rashi, and Solitreo. The other teachers only used Latin script in their classes. The teachers who did include Rashi and Solitreo did so because they considered it as a part of the

⁸ The use or non-use of accent marks in *Aki Yerushalayim* has seen several changes since the publication of the first number of the *revista*; for a detailed overview, see Álvarez López (2017).

Sephardic cultural heritage, and because they saw a need for more scholars able to read historic documents that will otherwise remain inaccessible to research.

The teachers showed differing views on how to include dialectal varieties of Ladino in their classes. Whereas some of them emphasised the importance of reflecting the linguistic variation in their courses, others talked about the need to use a more standardised form of the language, reflecting so-called ideologies of authenticity or anonymity (Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby, 2021: 107). Finding a standardised form of Ladino may present another challenge, however, as the teachers did not agree on where to find it. Teacher 8, for instance, said that he wanted to “dar valor a la diversidad linguística” [value the linguistic diversity], but he also claimed that he predominantly used the Istanbul variety of the language, stating: “no es posible avlar todo” [it is not possible to speak every (variety)]. Teacher 7 stated that he considered the Istanbul variety of Ladino as the de facto standard form of the language, due to the fact that it has preserved the largest number of speakers, and that it is used in contemporary publications such as *El Amaneser* and *Aki Yerushalayim*. He thought that this variety, therefore, should be the one predominantly taught to others. This view was to some extent also shared by Teacher 5, and by Teacher 6, who claimed that the Istanbul variety of Ladino had been the standard for Ladino publications also outside Istanbul, for instance in Salonica before the Second World War.⁹ Teacher 1 also considered Turkish dialects of Ladino as the most relevant for teaching, but did not single out a particular Turkish variety.

On a less Turko-centric note, Teacher 2 wanted to establish a “standard mínimo” [a minimum standard] of the language to teach to students. Such a standard variety would concern both writing (including, e.g., spelling conventions), as well as other forms of the language, such as morpho-syntax, or which vocabulary to use. However, the same teacher also stated that the linguistic variation within the language is not well known among all of the native speakers, and that she herself was gaining conscience about it as she kept working with the language. This means that, even to mother tongue speakers of Ladino, reflecting the language’s varieties in teaching activities may pose a challenge, especially if they are not represented in textbooks or other available teaching resources.

Teacher 3 recommended mentioning differences between regional varieties of Ladino when teaching the language, but she was more concerned to emphasise Ladino’s non-Castilian-ness; if Ladino has a Spanish sounding word and a Turkish sounding word for the same thing or concept, she preferred to use the Turkish word, to highlight that Ladino is something different than Spanish. To Teacher 4, separating Ladino vocabulary from Castilian Spanish was also important, as to Teacher 7, who wished to preserve the

⁹ This claim has not been verified by other sources.

“correct” forms of the language and to avoid its “contamination” of other languages, especially Castilian Spanish. He saw this as a challenge when new Ladino speakers who know Castilian Spanish learn Ladino and, perhaps, even begin teaching the language. Therefore, Teacher 7 expressed that he focused on strengthening the language proficiency among heritage speakers of Ladino, so that they in turn may be able to train new teachers. He saw a danger in relying too much on Castilian Spanish speakers: “Si el djudeo-espanyol va ser arebivido por avlantes de kastilyano ... se arebiva komo un dialekto del kastilyano” [If Djudeo-Espanyol is revitalised by Castilian speakers ... it will be revitalised as a dialect of Castilian Spanish]. Teacher 8, on the other hand, stated that it is a good thing that students of non-Sephardic backgrounds also learn the language, as this in turn encourages mother tongue speakers to use the language themselves.

The most outspoken defender of Ladino’s linguistic varieties, Teacher 9, stated that the dialectal variation in itself is an intrinsic part of what makes Ladino, Ladino, and therefore of great importance also for the teaching of the language. He said:

Yo penso ... ke la naturaleza diasporika i plural i diversa, i extraterritorial, del ladino no korresponde kon una estandarizasyón i kon una normalizasyón i ke no es menester ke el ladino seiga o tenga los atributos de otras linguas soi-disant modernas para ke seiga konsiderada una lingua propria. ... No veigo deké aprovar de ser komo otras linguas kuando no es komo otra lingua [I think ... that the diasporic and pluralistic and diverse, and extraterritorial, nature of Ladino does not correspond to any standardisation or normalisation, and that there is no need for Ladino to be or to have the attributes of other so-called modern languages to be seen as a proper language. ... I do not see why it should try to be like other languages when it is not like any other language].

Teacher 9, however, stated that he preferred one written standard form for the language, based on the *Aki Yerushalayim* orthography, without explaining why he preferred a certain orthographic standard rather than keeping a variety of traditional spelling systems.

5.3. Teacher’s need for further Ladino teaching

Many of the expressed needs for future Ladino revitalisation are, quite naturally, directly or indirectly related to the expressed challenges presented in the previous section. Some needs are related to teachers’ working conditions. Others concern questions about language standardisation, the access to textbooks and other teaching resources, and access to venues where the language can be used. Finally, the teachers mentioned needs concerning professional development as language teachers.

5.3.1. *Students and stable teaching conditions*

Teachers 2 and 3 mentioned the need for more students to enable further courses in the language. Teacher 3 said: “No tengo menester de otra koza, solamente [elevos] *interesados*” [I don’t need anything else, only (students who are) *interested*]. She explained that she had had hundreds of students with varying degrees of commitment, when she had offered courses free of charge. Lately, she had started offering courses for a tuition fee. New students still arrive continuously, albeit in smaller numbers, but showing greater commitment compared to before. However, the teachers do not only need an influx of students; they also require stable positions as teachers. Teacher 3 clarified that it would be beneficial if Ladino teachers could get paid in order to give courses for free to more people: “Sería muy bueno, por egzemplo, ke los maestros aresivieran su paga, de la parte de una universitá o de una institusyón, i pudieran ofreser los cursos de baldes a la mayoría de la djente” [It would be very good, for instance, if the teachers got paid, from a university or an institution, and could offer courses for free to a majority of people].

These stances may seem contradictory at first, but the need for universities or other institutions to secure Ladino teaching by financing teachers was also reflected in the interview with Teacher 6, who currently teaches for free. He said that he felt no need for himself to get paid for his efforts, but that he did not consider this a sustainable solution for the future of Ladino teaching: “no kreo ke puede continuar ansina” [I don’t think it can go on like this]. Teacher 6 emphasised that future teachers need to be able to make a living out of their teaching. In the same vein, Teacher 9 talked about the importance of creating stable teaching posts for Ladino teachers and researchers at universities or within the *Autoridad Nasionala del Ladino* as a way to secure future Ladino teaching.

5.3.2. *Language proficiency certificates*

A topic partially related to teachers’ opportunities to find stable teaching posts in academia or elsewhere concerned the possible establishment of some kind of official certificate of Ladino language proficiency (comparable, for instance, to the *DELE Spanish Diplomas*¹⁰ based on the proficiency levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*¹¹). Such a certificate could possibly be managed by an official body like the *Autoridad Nasionala del Ladino*, who would, then, organise standardised language tests and issue the certificates.

¹⁰ See <https://www.dele.org>.

¹¹ See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>.

Here, too, views among the interviewed teachers were quite disparate. Some of the teachers had never thought of such a thing before, or, in the case of Teacher 8, presented no specific, personal views on the question. Teachers 1, 3, and 4 conceded that a language certificate might be a good idea, as they believed that an official document stating a person's Ladino proficiency could help raising the language's status. Teacher 3 pointed out that a certificate could also be useful for prospective future Ladino teachers seeking a position within academia, adding that it could possibly be a prerequisite for accessing a Ladino teacher formation course, if such a course was to be implemented.

On the other hand, Teacher 8 commented that he was aware of divergent views among other Ladino activists on official language certificates, and Teacher 9 saw such "proyectos institucionales de normalización i estandarización" [institutional projects of normalisation and standardisation] as incompatible with the diasporic, differentiated and extraterritorial nature of Ladino. This shows, once more, that different views on the nature of the language and different ideologies regarding language revitalisation affect the teachers' ideas on how to teach, revitalise, or preserve the language.

5.3.3. *Updated resources for teaching and learning, and an updated vocabulary*

Nine out of ten teachers mentioned the dearth of updated resources for teaching, or difficulties to get access to texts to use in their classes. Teacher 6 expressed a need for further digitisation of archival media, such as newspapers published in Ladino, to ease the retrieval of historic texts to be used in teaching. Seven teachers (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9) talked about the need for new textbooks, in printed as well as digital formats. Among them, Teacher 4 explained that a textbook may be a good support for teachers in general, and for new teachers in particular, as it may help them to design a new course and, even, to strengthen their courage to start teaching the language. Talking about Ladino textbooks, Teacher 5 commented that the existing ones are becoming quite dated, and that she would like to see new resources adapted to younger learners' preferences: "Estamos en 2022. Los elevos tyenen otra manera ... nesesitan ser mas interactivos, i el mundo es mucho mas rapido" [We're in 2022. The students have another way of ... they need to be more interactive, and the world is much faster]. This view was also expressed by Teacher 2, who said: "si keres ke ambezemos a los mansevos, devemos azer kozas en el internet i en chikos pedasos" [if you want to teach young people, we have to do things on the Internet and in small bits].

Teacher 9 pointed out that prospective Ladino learners may not always have the opportunity to find a teacher. With this in mind, apart from traditional resources to be used in teaching, he also mentioned specifically the need to develop "productos para ke la djente puedan ambezarsen el ladino sin menester de profesor" [resources for people to be able to

learn Ladino without the need for a teacher]. This would be particularly useful for a language as Ladino where there is a shortage of teachers and for which there so far exist no official language teachers' training courses. According to Teacher 9, one part of creating such resources could consist in simplifying some of the older, existing textbooks, which he considered too complicated and possibly demotivating for some students.

All of the interviewed teachers taught Latin script, based on the *Aki Yerushalayim* orthography, but, when discussing needs for future teaching, five of them (3, 5, 6, 8, and 9) also mentioned the need to teach how to read Rashi and Solitreo scripts. Teacher 5 explained this need by saying: "porke la kultura sefaradí fina el sekolo vente está eskrita en rashi" [because the Sephardic culture, up till the 20th century, is written in Rashi]. Teachers 6, 8, and 9 talked about the need to train new Ladino speakers in reading the old scripts, and Teacher 8 particularly stressed the need to create further resources for learning Solitreo. For Teacher 9, teaching Rashi and Solitreo was seen as "un djesto de-kolonial" [a de-colonising gesture], connecting the language to its historical origin. Teachers 8 and 9 emphasised that teaching Rashi and Solitreo is important not only for future research, but also for being able to help the Sephardic community, where the great majority have lost the ability to read documents left by older relatives. Thus, additional resources to learn the different scripts are also needed.

Teachers 1, 2, and 8 talked about the need for new words in Ladino, specifying that the language lacks an updated, contemporary vocabulary. Teacher 1, a mother tongue speaker of Ladino, said: "No tenemos bastante biervos, porke la lingua mia era de kaza, de ... kozas simples" [We don't have enough words, because mine was a language of the home, of ... simple things]. In the same vein, Teacher 2 claimed that: "Ay palabras ke m'estan dando inyervos, ke no ay el ekivalente en djudeo-espanyol. Komo traduzes la palabra *dude*?" [There are words that get on my nerves, that don't have an equivalent in Judaeo-Spanish. How do you translate the word *dude*?].

Closely related to this issue is the need for new or improved Ladino dictionaries, a necessity mentioned by teachers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8. Two of the teachers specified that they wanted to see online dictionaries,¹² and Teacher 4 said that she saw a need for a dictionary specifically designed for beginner learners. Teacher 7 also mentioned the need for an accessible Ladino grammar and a book on Ladino pragmatics.

¹² Some Ladino dictionaries are, indeed, available online. The most complete is the Avner Peretz Ladino-Hebrew online dictionary (<http://folkmasa.org/milon/pmilonh.htm>). As for printed dictionaries, there are a handful (e.g., de Tolédo et al., 2021; Kohen & Kohen-Gordon, 2000; Nehama, 2003; Perahya, 2012; Perahya & Perahya, 1998), of varying exactitude. One problem concerning the existing dictionaries is their varying quality and the fact that one ideally needs to speak Hebrew, Turkish, French, and English to be able to make use of them all.

5.3.4. *Venues for learning and for using the language*

Teachers 5 and 10 talked about the importance of making Ladino visible in schools. Teacher 5 mentioned that this should be done in Israeli schools, as a way to raise the level of awareness about Ladino as a part of the Israeli cultural heritage. Likewise, Teacher 10 wanted to include lessons about Jewish history and language in Spanish schools, as a way to raise consciousness about an oft-forgotten part of the country's history.

To create new generations of mother tongue speakers, Teachers 1 and 7 mentioned the need for Ladino preschools ("mestras") or schools ("eskolas") where young children may learn the language, at least for one or a few hours a week. Teacher 7 said that the only place where this may still be possible is Istanbul, considering the fact that the city still has a Sephardic community of a certain size, or, perhaps, in some Sephardic communities in Israel; "ama está muy *skeptiko*" [but I am very *sceptical* about it].

Teacher 3 also expressed a need not only for schools where children can learn Ladino, but also for a greater number of courses for adult learners, in more countries around the world, and adapted to learners' different mother tongues, for instance with textbooks and other resources available in different languages. However, for this to become reality, Teacher 3 believed that Ladino activists "need to provide places where there is a need to use the language",¹³ that is, places where Ladino *can* be used and *must* be used, also outside of educational contexts. This was an idea shared by Teachers 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, and 9. Teacher 3 continued: "Me parese ke para ke la lingua tenga un avenir, tenemos ke dar espasyos ande la lingua se pueda uzar" [I believe that for the language to have a future, we have to create spaces where the language can be used]. Such a place would ideally be physical, a part of the geography, but Teacher 3 also acknowledged that the Internet can provide and already *is* providing venues where the language is spoken and must be spoken by people who want to participate, "komo una shena avierta" [like an open stage] where Ladino speakers can engage more actively and less formally in spoken conversation. She pointed out that platforms enabling these "open stages", such as Zoom, come with a cost and that someone has to pay for them. She would like to see a university, or some other academic institution help the community out with this. Ideally, the *Autoridad Nasionala de Ladino* and/or the *Akademia Nasionala de Ladino* could help facilitating the infrastructure needed for this kind of solutions.

¹³ "Me parese ke tenemos ke dar lugares ande esto sea menester de uzar."

5.3.5. Teachers' pedagogical development

The necessity to reach and teach people (that is, in order to foster new Ladino speakers) does not only concern a need to find more students, as mentioned above, but also a need to find new teachers. Currently, there are no courses aimed at becoming a Ladino teacher, or offering training in language teaching methodologies for already active Ladino teachers. Teacher 3 underlined that, in order to open Ladino schools or to be able to offer Ladino classes in already existing schools, there is a need for courses on language teaching methodologies for already active, or future teachers. She said: “me parese ke ay tantos cursos oy ke no tienen una didaktika profesionala” [it seems to me that there are many courses today that do not have a professional pedagogical approach]. This was echoed by Teacher 5, who wanted to see financial support for individuals who want to become Ladino teachers, as well as language education research projects focused on Ladino teaching and learning. To accomplish this, Teacher 5 wished for “un komité pedagójiko” [a pedagogic committee], perhaps under the auspices of the *Akademia Nasionala del Ladino*.

In lieu of official teacher training courses, Teachers 3, 4, and 5 proposed online meetings for active Ladino teachers to exchange experiences, discuss pedagogical ideas, share resources and tips for teaching, and so forth. Teacher 3 said:

Me plazería ke tuvieramos un lugar ande los maestros pudíamos konoseremos, avlar kada uno kon otro, kualo estás aziendo, ke te reushió kon la djente, ke les plaze a los elevos, kenes se ambezan mas o menos o deshan pasar el tiempo...? Esto sería una koza interesante, komo una espesie di *simposio* de maestros *no* maestros de ladino. [I would like for us to have a place where the teachers could get to know each other, to speak to one another, what are you doing, what went well for you with people, what do the students like, which ones are learning more or less or are just there to while away the time...? This would be an interesting thing, like a kind of symposium for teachers *not* (trained as) teachers in Ladino.]

6. CONCLUSIONS

The results presented in the previous section showed some common concerns or thoughts about current and future Ladino teaching, as well as diverging views on the topic. Common challenges and needs expressed by the teachers concerned issues related to students, teachers, and the language itself, and to the availability of updated textbooks and other resources for teaching.

Varying language backgrounds or proficiencies presented challenges in mixed groups, especially with students who speak Castilian Spanish, and Hebrew, respectively. Students as well as inexperienced teachers may feel insecure about speaking Ladino; for the teachers, this was true not only among new speakers, but also to some extent among mother tongue

speakers of Ladino, due to years of not using the language actively. Engaging learners in online conversations with mother tongue speakers was mentioned as a fruitful way forward for developing oral skills, and for developing a sense of belonging to the Ladino speaking community.

Questions about language standardisation, language testing and how to reflect language diversity in classes proved somewhat controversial. These were issues where the interviewed teachers disagreed most with each other. Some of them adhered more closely to ideologies of authenticity, wanting to safeguard the language from foreign (especially Castilian Spanish) elements, and/or emphasising the need to include all dialects in classes. Others, rather, expressed views closer to ideologies of anonymity (for both concepts, cf. Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby, 2021), stating a need to use a standardised language form in classes, generally based upon the Istanbul variety of Ladino.

Depending on how they are enacted in language revitalisation activities, discrepancies in views on language variation may be valuable for preserving Ladino's multi-faceted nature, but, one could argue, may also prove counter-productive if they risk depreciating the teaching of some variety/varieties at the expense of others, or if they hinder necessary neologisms and other changes typical of a living language.

Discussions about language normativity also touched upon the desire of certain teachers to establish an official Ladino proficiency test and certificate. An official certificate of Ladino proficiency was seen by some participants as a means to raise the language's status, and possibly to enhance chances of finding a teaching position within academia. To others, a certificate was incompatible with Ladino's diverse nature.

Regardless of stances on language diversity or normativity, one may wonder what will happen with Ladino's dialectal variation in the future. Many Ladino learners already participate in classes of more than one teacher and encounter different language varieties. The learners themselves come with different linguistic backgrounds, which may influence their spoken Ladino. It is not implausible that Ladino learners will mix traits of several dialects, and eventually create a new type of Ladino (cf. Zuckermann, 2020, about language change in revitalisation processes.) This does not in itself necessarily constitute a problem, but Ladino teachers and (other) activists may need to be aware of it. If they wish to promote or preserve any specific dialectal variety of the language, more dialectal specific courses and textbooks may be needed in the future.

Many Ladino revitalisation activities are, today, performed on a non-profit, grassroots level. Even if this was not an issue to some teachers, others emphasised the need for secure, paid teacher positions at universities or within other institutions. A few teachers mentioned the need to open preschools or schools for children. For this to happen, a long-term, financial

support will surely also be needed. Considering the diasporic nature of the language, and of the world-wide Sephardic community, online solutions will surely play an important role for this to take place. Ideally, programmes to support families who want to reclaim Ladino as a heritage language would also be beneficial (cf. Hinton, 2010).

To facilitate further teaching and learning, the teachers, almost unanimously, wished for new and/or updated textbooks, grammars, and other resources for teaching, adapted to learners' different mother tongues and to today's students' preferences. Some of the teachers also called for an updated Ladino vocabulary, reflecting the modern world. This was closely related to the expressed need to give learners opportunities to use the language in contexts outside classes, to show them that the language is usable for contemporary purposes.

Ladino is currently being taught both by individuals trained as teachers (in foreign languages as well as in other subjects), and by persons with no teacher training. Hinton (2010) talks about the necessity of training persons involved in language revitalisation in language teaching theories and methods. Establishing a Ladino teacher training programme would, perhaps, be ideal for the future supply of teachers, but it is not very plausible, given the small number of Ladino speakers. Since there is no official Ladino teacher training programme, a more viable solution, mentioned by a few of the interviewees, would be providing online teacher development courses or symposia focusing on language education methodologies and theories. Such initiatives may already exist, but the study shows that they are not known by or available to all the teachers. As an outcome of the present study, the researcher proposes to work for the establishment of a series of such symposia together with members of the Sephardic community.

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