

Words in Motion

Ladino and the languages of migration in Sephardic life stories

Subject	Language, Linguistics, History
Grade level	Secondary and undergraduate (adaptable)
Duration	One 60-minute class period
Skills	Close reading, etymology, spatial reasoning
Tools	Sephardi Spaces database and world map, ChatGPT/Copilot

Overview

Sephardic communities spoke and wrote in several languages as they moved. Ladino, also called Judeo-Spanish, carried medieval Castilian across the Ottoman world and the Americas and took in Hebrew, Turkish, Greek, French, and other words along the way. Students read a multilingual life story and track how the languages a person used point to the places they lived and the generation they belonged to.

Learning objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify the languages present in a Sephardic life story and connect them to places and periods.
- Explain how Ladino kept older Spanish forms while absorbing new words across migration.
- Use the database and world map to link language use to specific communities.
- Produce a short annotated language profile of one figure.

Materials and tools

- Sephardi Spaces database and Sephardi world map.
- One multilingual biography or a short Ladino passage with its translation.
- AI tools for translation and etymology: ChatGPT or Copilot.
- A simple language-origin chart for students to fill in.

Connection to Sephardi Spaces

Ask the AI research assistant, “Find Sephardic figures who used Ladino and French,” then place those figures on the world map. Matching a person’s languages to the ports and cities on their route shows students that language records movement as clearly as dates and places do.

Lesson sequence (about 60 minutes)

Warm-up (10 min). Show a short Ladino passage without translation. Ask students which languages they think they recognize in it.

Guided analysis (15 min). Provide the translation. Using an AI tool, students tag words by likely origin (Spanish, Hebrew, Turkish, Greek, French) and fill in the language-origin chart.

Mapping (20 min). In pairs, students connect the language mix to a plausible route on the world map and find one database figure from a matching community.

Share-out (15 min). Each pair presents a short language profile: the figure, the languages used, and what those languages reveal about the route.

Assessment

- Exit ticket: one paragraph on how a person's languages can serve as evidence of migration.
- Rubric focus: accuracy of word origins, quality of the map connection, and clarity of the language profile.

Extension and differentiation

- **Extension:** Students compare two figures from different generations and describe how the language mix shifts.
- **Support:** Provide a pre-tagged passage and a shortlist of three map communities.
- **Cross-curricular:** Pair with a language class to compare Ladino forms with modern Spanish.