Lexical borrowing and gender assignment in Judeo-Spanish

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Abstract

As a dialect of Spanish, Judeo-Spanish utilizes a two gender system in order to divide nouns into masculine and feminine categories. While in the Iberian Peninsula, this dialect borrowed numerous lexical items from Hebrew (also having two genders) for legal and religious purposes. Also, after 1492, in Ottoman lands, the language borrowed words from Turkish (without a gender system). In this paper, I argue that extensive lexical borrowing from these languages ultimately reshaped the Spanish gender assignment system, allowing it to interpret stress-final vowels differently, and assigning stress differently from other Spanish dialects.

Keywords: Judeo-Spanish, Sephardic, Spanish dialect, lexical borrowing, gender.
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Table of Contents

1 Introduction
2 Gender Assignment
3 Gender assignment in the lexical borrowings from Hebrew
4 Gender assignment and lexical borrowings from Turkish
5 Development of the system
References

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1 Introduction

Judeo-Spanish, also known as Ladino and Djudezmo, is the Spanish dialect spoken by the descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 and in 1497 and who settled primarily in the Ottoman Empire. Like all dialects of Spanish, Judeo-Spanish morphology has a two-gender (masculine and feminine) assignment system which requires all nouns to be assigned into one gender category. Therefore, lexical items from other languages are modified to fit these morphological categories. In this paper, I examine the incorporation of Hebrew (with two genders) and Turkish (with no gender system) nouns into Judeo-Spanish and the impact these languages had in reshaping the dialect's morphology.

2 Gender Assignment

Gender is based on two kinds of information provided by the noun: semantic (meaning-based) and morphosyntactic or phonological (form-based) (Corbett 1991, 7–8). A semantic system takes into account the *meaning* of the noun, that is, whether it is animate or inanimate, human or nonhuman, male or female (Corbett 1991, 30). Nouns which denote male characters (such as men, gods, or male higher animals) are assigned masculine gender, and the feminine gender works in a similar fashion. Remaining nouns which are neither male nor female, denominated the semantic residue by Corbett (1991, 35), are consequently assigned neuter gender.

Corbett (1991) postulates that meaning-based gender assignment is actually the core of form-based systems. That is, there is no gender assignment system that is purely morphological (Corbett 1991, 33–34). Let us analyze the Judeo-Spanish system using Corbett's analysis. First of all, sex is a relevant factor in noun division (Corbett 1991, 34, 68). Sex-differentiable nouns pertaining to males tend to acquire masculine gender; those pertaining to females are assigned feminine gender. Observe the following definite article and noun combinations in Judeo-Spanish:

Table 1. *Sex-differentiable nouns in Judeo-Spanish*

	Masculine gender (males)		**Feminine gender (females)**
(1)	el ombre 'the man'	(4)	la mujer 'the woman'
(2)	el mansevo 'the young man'	(5)	la ninya 'the girl'
(3)	el padre 'the father'	(6)	la madre 'the mother'

In Spanish, the semantic residue (nouns that are not sex-differentiable) is distributed among the masculine and feminine genders. Some languages, such as German, Greek, and Russian, divide the semantic residue into three: masculine, feminine, and neuter (Corbett 1991, 35). Corbett proposes two mechanisms by

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which nouns of the semantic residue are integrated into the different categories: inflectional morphology patterns, such as declensions, and phonological patterns, such as the last phoneme of the word (Corbett 1991, 36, 49). Linguists have attempted to classify the gender of Spanish residue nouns using a combination of semantic and phonological characteristics.

In the Bull system, male beings, countries, bodies of water, mountains, numbers, calendar nomenclature, and ships are masculine. Female beings and letters of the alphabet, as well as nouns ending in /-a/ (with many exceptions) belong to the feminine gender (Bergen 1978). Even though there haven several phonological approaches (such as that of Bergen 1978), the analysis of Nissen (2001) is the most general. Nissen (2001) proposes a phonologically-based system using percentages of occurrences in which 99.89 % of Spanish nouns that end in /o/ are assigned to the masculine gender, 96.6 % of nouns that end in /a/ are assigned to the feminine category, and about 89.35 % of those that end in /e/ are found in the masculine gender. Most forms of inflection in adjectives, determiners, and pronouns follow this vowel distinction (Nissen 2001, 252, 254). In this paper, a phonologically-based system of gender assignment will be employed to describe the incorporation of lexicon from other languages in Judeo-Spanish.

Studies of gender-lexical borrowing interaction seem to be limited in regard to Spanish versus another language. Corbett (1991, 71–82) provides some basis to analyze the assignment of gender in lexical borrowings. For example, in meaning-based systems, gender can be predictable (Corbett 1991, 71); that is, if the borrowed noun denotes a male person, then the assigned gender will be male regardless of the system of the previous language, or even if there was no system at all. The same predictability can be argued for morphological systems where loan words must fit the morphological pattern of the language. For instance, borrowings from Nahuatl (Uto-Aztecan) into Spanish were modified from the Nahuatl -CC endings to the Spanish -CV; for example, Nahuatl *tomatl* > Spanish *tomate*, Nahuatl *chocolatl* > Spanish *chocolate*, Nahuatl *coyotl* > Spanish *coyote* (Moreno de Alba 1995, 61). Once loan words fit the morphology, they are assigned gender. In fact, because loan words are fully incorporated into the language, Corbett concludes that the gender of borrowings is determined exactly like that of other nouns in the language (Corbett 1991, 72, 74). These and other criteria will be discussed in detail as they are applied to the Hebrew (a form-based system with two gender categories) and Turkish (with no gender categories) lexicon in Judeo-Spanish.

3 Gender assignment in the lexical borrowings from Hebrew

The Jewish communities of the Iberian Peninsula employed Hebrew (and Aramaic, to a lesser extent) for legal, educational, and religious purposes until their expulsion in 1492. This usage created some level of bilingualism between He-

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brew and the different Iberian Romance languages such as Galician-Portuguese, Aragonese, Navarrese, Catalan, and Castilian (Wexler 1981, 119; Leroy 1990, 66–67; Sáenz-Badillos 1993, 202–203; see also Miller 2000). In this bilingual environment, Jewish communities incorporated Hebrew terminology into their common Romance language, creating Judeo-Iberian Romance languages (Harris 1979, 30–32; Rodrigue-Schwarzwald 1985, 139). This terminology (exemplified in Table 2 below) was inherited by Judeo-Spanish, as the language developed outside the Iberian Peninsula and became the language of the Sephardic exiles.

TABLE 2. *Hebrew lexicon in Judeo-Spanish* [1]

Religion			Law			Culture		
(7)	neshamá 'soul'	נשמה	(11)	din 'justice'	דין	(15)	lashón 'language'	לשון
(8)	hahám 'rabbi'	חכם	(12)	hazará 'restitution'	חזרה	(16)	goy 'non-Jew'	גוי
(9)	derush 'sermon'	דרוש	(13)	get 'divorce'	גט	(17)	simán 'sign'	סמן
(10)	genizá 'book storage'	גניזה	(14)	herém 'excommunication'	חרם	(18)	aynará 'evil eye'	עין הרע

In order to understand the influence that Hebrew had on Judeo-Spanish gender assignment, we need to understand the Hebrew system itself. Gender assignment in Hebrew is a form-based system with two categories: masculine and feminine. As described above, this form-based system has semantic stage, so that sex-differentiable nouns are assigned masculine (male humans and some animals) and feminine (female humans and some animals). Table 3 below exemplifies sex-differentiable nouns and some of their suffixes (Hebrew data from Rosén 1966):

TABLE 3. *Masculine and feminine gender in Hebrew according to sex-differentiable nouns*[2]

Masculine gender				Feminine gender			
	Hebrew		English gloss		Hebrew		English gloss
(19)	/'ish/	איש	'man'	(22)	/'ish-á/	אישה	'woman'
(20)	/dod/	דוד	'uncle'	(23)	/dod-á/	דודה	'aunt'
(21)	/yehudí/	יהודי	'Jewish man'	(24)	/yehudí-t/	יהודית	'Jewish woman'

The criteria beyond sex-differentiable nouns (semantic residue) seem to be based phonologically. In Hebrew there is no masculine inflectional suffix, instead, we find a feminine inflectional suffix attached to the masculine root:

[1] Hebrew is written from right to left.
[2] N.B. Feminine suffixes separated by a hyphen to facilitate comparison.

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/-á/ ה-. Even though this suffix is predominant, there are other feminine suffixes: /-t/ ת-, and /-át/ הת-. The distribution of each depends on the terminal phonology of the masculine root. Therefore, with very few exceptions, all the non-sex-differentiable nouns in Hebrew that phonologically end in one of the feminine suffixes acquire feminine gender. Those that do not are assigned a default masculine gender, as illustrated in Table 4 below:

TABLE 4. *Masculine and feminine gender in Hebrew in semantic residue nouns*

	Masculine gender				**Feminine gender**		
	Hebrew		English gloss		Hebrew		English gloss
(25)	/mazál/	מזל	'luck'	(28)	/menorá/	מנורה	'lamp'
(26)	/zman/	זמן	'time, occasion'	(29)	/'avóda/	עבודה	'work'
(27)	/dor/	דור	'generation'	(30)	/ivrít/	עברית	'Hebrew language'

Notice how not all /-á/ ה- suffixes are stressed (29). This is an interesting feature I will discuss later. It must be noted, however, that because /-á/ ה- is the feminine inflectional morpheme, most feminine words in Hebrew end with this suffix. This suffix also appears in most inflectional morphology, for example, in adjectives and verb conjugations (Hebrew marks the gender of the agent in verb conjugations). Below are the Hebrew morphemes for gender and number used for both adjectives and nouns:

TABLE 5. *Hebrew gender and number suffixes (examples with adjectives)*

Gloss	**Singular**						**Plural**					
	Masculine			Feminine *-a*			Masculine *-im*			Feminine *-ot*		
'good'	(31)	tov	טוב	(35)	tov-á	טובה	(39)	tov-ím	טובים	(43)	tov-ót	טובות
'bad'	(32)	ra	רע	(36)	ra'-á	רעה	(40)	ra'-ím	רעים	(44)	ra'-ót	רעות
'big'	(33)	gadól	גדול	(37)	g'dol-á	גדולה	(41)	g'dol-ím	גדולים	(45)	g'dol-ót	גדולות
'small'	(34)	katán	קטן	(38)	k'tan-á	קטנה	(42)	k'tan-ím	קטנים	(46)	k'tan-ót	קטנות

Corbett claims that the gender of lexical borrowings is determined exactly like that of other nouns in the language (Corbett 1991, 74). Therefore, all Hebrew nouns which denote male human beings or higher animals should be assigned masculine gender in Spanish, and those which denote female human beings or higher animals, should be assigned feminine gender. Our data (Néhama & Cantera 1977; Minervini 1992; Magdalena 1996; Danon *et al*. 1997; Bunis 1999; Kohen & Kohen-Gordon 2000) demonstrate that this is a correct deduction:

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TABLE 6. *Hebrew sex-differentiated nouns and their genders in Judeo-Spanish*

Masculine gender showed by Judeo-Spanish masculine article *el*				**Feminine gender showed by Judeo-Spanish masculine article *la***			
Noun from Hebrew			English gloss	Noun from Hebrew			English gloss
(47)	el bohór	בחר	'eldest son'	(51)	la bohóra	בחרה	'eldest daugher'
(48)	el goy	גוי	'non-Jewish man'	(52)	la góya	גויה	'non-Jewish woman'
(49)	el hahám	חכם	'rabbi'	(53)	la yetomá	יתומה	'orphan girl'
(50)	el givír	גביר	'nobleman'	(54)	la geverét	גברת	'lady'

In addition, Spanish has a predominantly productive suffix for the feminine gender and no masculine marker (Nissen 2001, 255). This situation is not only parallel to Hebrew morphosyntax, which lacks a masculine suffix, but the predominant Hebrew feminine suffix is phonologically identical, except for stress, to its Spanish counterpart /a/. My claim is that due to this phonetic similarity, as well as to the similar gender assignment mechanisms, the non-sex-differentiated feminine words in Hebrew are ultimately assigned feminine gender in Judeo-Spanish, with the masculine gender as default. Therefore, gender assignment for Hebrew nouns in Judeo-Spanish functions as:

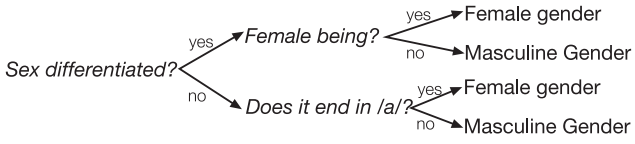


FIGURE 1. *Gender assignment for Hebrew nouns in Judeo-Spanish*

The gender assignment system in Figure 1 accounts for the gender of most Hebrew words in Judeo-Spanish. For example, the word *arón* 'cupboard, ark, coffin' is not sex-differentiated and it does not end in /a/, therefore it is assigned the masculine gender. The word *hayá* 'animal' is not sex-differentiated, but it ends in /a/, therefore it is assigned the feminine gender. The following nouns illustrate this gender assignment mechanism:

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Table 7. *Hebrew non sex-differentiated nouns and their genders in Judeo-Spanish*

Masculine gender showed by Judeo-Spanish masculine article *el*				**Feminine gender showed by Judeo-Spanish masculine article *la***			
Noun from Hebrew			English gloss	Noun from Hebrew			English gloss
(55)	el arón	ארון	'cupboard, ark'	(60)	la aregá	הרגה	'great peril'
(56)	el daat	דעת	'intelligence'	(61)	la gaavá	גאוה	'arrogance'
(57)	el din	דין	'justice'	(62)	la geulá	גאולה	'deliverance'
(58)	el guf	גוף	'body, substance'	(63)	la guzmá	גזמה	'exaggeration'
(59)	el simán	סמן	'sign'	(64)	la tefilá	תפילה	'prayer'

The merging of the Hebrew /á/ and Romance /a/ feminine suffixes can be visibly exposed by their identical orthography when writing Judeo-Spanish in Hebrew letters, that is, both Hebrew /á/ and Romance /a/ with *heh* ה-.

In spite of this regularity, there are some nouns such as *el ehréa* < Hebrew הכרה 'need' and *la rash* < Hebrew רעש 'earthquake' that should be feminine and masculine respectively, but they kept their Hebrew gender (although in this case exceptions to the Hebrew pattern itself). Corbett (1991, 80) argues that nouns can keep their original language gender situation in speech communities with high levels of bilingualism, for example the Sorbian-German bilingual communities where it can be argued that German gender is preserved in words of German origin in Sorbian. The system for gender assignment for Hebrew lexicon in Judeo-Spanish, however, accounts for most of the data.

4 Gender assignment and lexical borrowings from Turkish

After the 1492 Expulsion from Spain, a great number of Sephardic Jews settled in urban centers throughout the Ottoman Empire, especially in the seaports of the eastern Mediterranean. As *zimmi*, or 'People of the Book' living in the Ottoman Empire, Jews had the right to keep their religion and language, create their own communal social and education services, and to serve in the lower ranks of the Ottoman Empire (Altabev 2003, 42; Benbassa & Rodrigue 2000, 2–3). Judeo-Spanish remained as a linguistic and cultural block for the dispersion of the Sephardic Jews throughout the Ottoman Empire for almost five-hundred years, and, as a result, it received numerous borrowings from Turkish. Séphiha (1997, 29) claims that about fifteen percent of Judeo-Spanish lexicon comes from Turkish, but this percentage may vary depending of the geographical location of speakers. Turkish, a member of the Altaic language family has no system to assign gender to its nouns, and, unlike Spanish and Hebrew, there are no morphological affixes that indicate any physical or grammatical

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gender. However, Turkish is similar to Hebrew in that nouns can be stress-final, with thousands of nouns ending in stressed /a/ vowel (Underhill 2001, 18). The Turkish lexicon in Judeo-Spanish represents a gamma of concepts: from everyday objects to Ottoman titles and specific occupations. Perhaps the most detailed linguistic study focusing on the Judeo-Spanish and Turkish contact is that of Varol-Bornes (1996). For example, she noticed that Turkish words which ended in /-é/ changed their endings to /-á/. For instance, Turkish *hastane* > Judeo-Spanish *(h)astaná* 'hospital' (Varol-Bornes 1996, 217); as I will demonstrate, this phonological alteration is crucial for gender assignment of Turkish loanwords in Judeo-Spanish.

Chronologically, the linguistic contact between Romance and Hebrew occurred centuries before Turkish contact with the speech of Sephardic Jews. Therefore, I will apply the gender assignment system elaborated in the previous section and reproduced below:

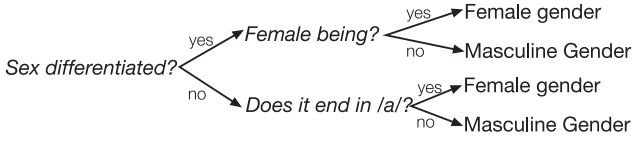


FIGURE 2. *A proposed system for gender assignment in Judeo-Spanish*

Following Corbett's assumption that loanwords are treated just like the 'native' words in the context of gender assignment (Corbett 1991, 72, 74), I postulate that the Turkish lexicon, therefore, was treated in the same way as the native Romance words and Hebrew borrowings. First, I will analyze the sex-differentiated nouns as illustrate below:

TABLE 8. *Turkish sex-differentiated nouns and their genders in Judeo-Spanish*

Masculine gender showed by Judeo-Spanish masculine article *el*			**Feminine gender showed by Judeo-Spanish masculine article *la***		
	Noun from Turkish	English gloss		Noun from Turkish	English gloss
(65)	el agá *ağa*	'lord'	(68)	la arnaúta *arnavut*	'Albanian girl'
(66)	el hodjá *hoca*	'husband'	(69)	la haberdjía *haverci*	'female gossiper'
(67)	el pashá *paşa*	'nobleman'	(70)	la maymóna *maymun*	'female monkey'

Table 8 shows that nouns which denote male individuals are assigned the masculine gender, and female individuals are assigned the feminine gender. Moreover, nouns which denote female beings are further given the suffix *-a*.

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This represents the need for a feminine suffix when denoting female beings and also the adaptation of the loanword to fit the Judeo-Spanish lexicon where the majority of nouns denoting female beings end in *-a*. Corbett labels this as semantic analogy (Corbett 1991, 75–76).

Next in our analysis are the non-sex-differentiated nouns or semantic residue. According to our system, nouns which end in /-a/, stressed or unstressed, will be assigned feminine gender, and those that do not will acquire a default masculine gender. This system works effectively for the Turkish lexicon in Judeo-Spanish (see Table 9 below). Thus, we can observe that the system used to determine gender categories for Hebrew lexicon assigns the correct gender present in our data to the Turkish loanwords.

TABLE 9. *Turkish semantic residue nouns and their genders in Judeo-Spanish*

Masculine gender showed by Judeo-Spanish masculine article *el*			**Feminine gender showed by Judeo-Spanish masculine article *la***		
	Noun from Turkish	English gloss		Noun from Turkish	English gloss
(71)	el chibúk *çübük*	'smoking pipe'	(76)	la baltá *balta*	'ax'
(72)	el rakí *rakı*	'alcoholic drink'	(77)	la udá *oda*	'bedroom'
(73)	el dip *dip*	'abyss'	(78)	la chorbá *çorba*	'soup'
(74)	el habér *haber*	'news'	(79)	la malá *mahalle*	'city quarter'
(75)	el nazár *nazar*	'evil eye'	(80)	las parás *para*	'money'

5 Development of the system

The development of the system for gender assignment in Judeo-Spanish has been modified throughout the history of the language. One way that we can argue that Judeo-Spanish developed a new gender-assignment system different from Castilian Spanish is by comparing how similar words were treated by both systems. For example, Romance languages do not allow their gender markers to be stressed. As a matter of fact, stress assignment theories, such as the Optimality Theory approach, work on the initial assumption that gender markers or word endings (the term used in Harris 1985) must be unstressed (Morales-Front & Núñez 1999).

This ambivalence regarding stressed final vowels is still present in modern Castilian Spanish as the language adopted words from other languages. In most instances Castilian Spanish opted to shift stress in order to obtain an unstressed word ending: *la cabala* or *la cabala* < Hebrew *kabbalá* 'Kabala', *la Tóra* < Hebrew *torá* 'Mosaic Law', *el aimára* < Aymara *aymará* 'Aymara man'. (Notice

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the masculine in the latter because it refers to a male person.) In a few cases where stress is kept in the final /-á/, either gender can be applied: *el/la maracuyá* 'passion fruit' (from Carib?). Surprisingly, in most cases where stressed /-á/ is kept, the masculine gender is assigned. This is probably because Modern Castilian Spanish does not recognize a stressed word ending as a natural word ending or inflectional gender suffix, but the end of the prosodic word itself (Morales-Front & Núñez 1999, 254). Thus, these /-á/ ending nouns are assigned the masculine gender, just as if they ended in a consonant that is not part of an inflectional morpheme. Some of the early /-á/ words include *el maná* (from Hebrew) 'manna', *el alcalá* (From Arabic) 'the castle', and *el sofa* (from Arabic) 'sofa, rug'. However, the majority come from the Americas and the Philippines as the Spanish conquest discovered a new world and borrowed most of the terminology to describe it from the local languages. Some of these examples are listed in Table 10 below.

TABLE 10. *Flora and fauna of the New World. Most words ending in /-á/ were assigned the masculine gender*[3]

	Spanish	English gloss		Spanish	English gloss
(81)	el abacá	'textile plant from the Philippines'	(89)	el majá	'snake from Cuba'
(82)	el aguará	'a species of fox'	(90)	el sapindá	'Argentinean shrub'
(83)	el arazá	'tree from Uruguay'	(91)	el pucará	'Inca fortress'
(84)	el caracará	'South American hawk'	(92)	el tarumá	'tree from Argentina'
(85)	el carayá	'South American howling monkey'	(93)	el zuindá	'owl-like bird'
(86)	el eyrá	'small South American puma'	(94)	el curá	'tree with resin'
(87)	el guará	'wolf of the Pampas'	(95)	el chajá	'ibis-like bird'
(88)	el guazubirá	'Argentinean deer'	(96)	el chipá	'corn and cheese cake from Argentina'

The pattern in Castilian Spanish assigned masculine gender to nouns that end in /á/. In Judeo-Spanish, this Romance-like pattern was modified to adapt the vast amount of Hebrew lexicon present in the Jewish speech in Medieval Iberia. This adaptation consisted in allowing final /-á/ non-sex-differentiated lexicon to be assigned the feminine gender even if such suffix was stressed. The fact that Turkish loanwords encountered in the Ottoman exile were assigned the feminine gender if they ended in stressed /-á/ illustrates that the amplification of the gender system was uniform by 1492. This scenario matches that of Corbett (1991, 81–82) which suggests that extensive and rapid borrowing may

[3]From *Larousse* 1989.

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be assimilated so effectively that speakers cannot distinguish, consciously or unconsciously, loan words from native words. The accumulated effect may change the gender system considerably. I believe this describes the situation with Romance and Hebrew words. In this new system, both /-a/ and /-á/ nouns were assigned feminine gender, while those lacking these endings acquired a default masculine gender.

The new system was further applied to the Turkish lexicon during the Ottoman exile. Non-sex-differentiated and inherently genderless Turkish lexicon acquired gender according to the presence or lack of final /-a/, whether or not it was stressed (for example in borrowings from Greek or Arabic into Turkish). We observe that the gender assignment system developed even further. In instances of Turkish nouns with female referents not ending in /-a/ or /-á/, an unstressed /-a/ is suffixed through semantic analogy, thus keeping the system uniform: Judeo-Spanish *memura* 'female clerk' < Turkish *memur* + feminine suffix /-a/. The development of the gender assignment system in Judeo-Spanish is summarized in Figure 3 below.

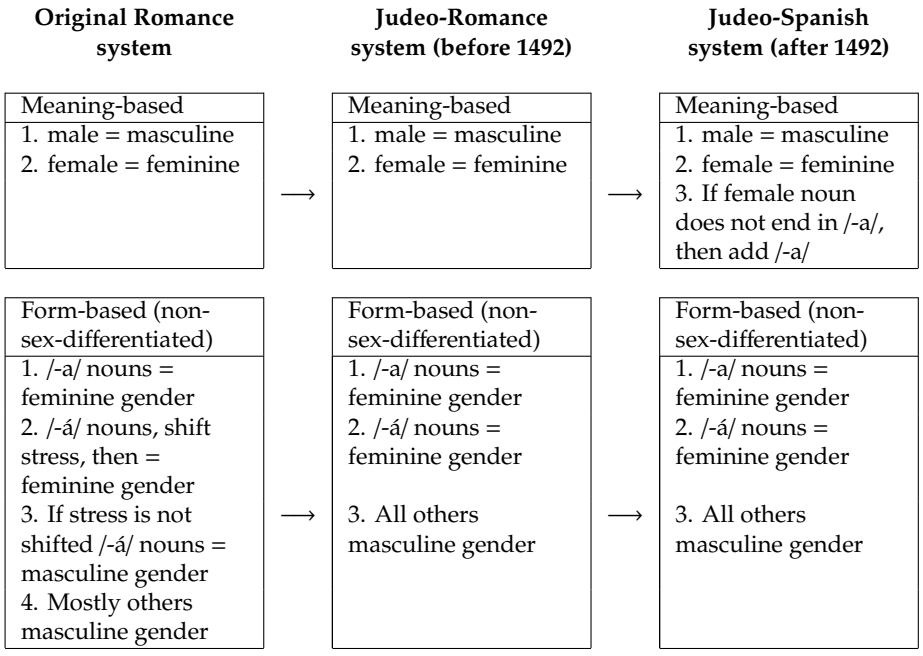


FIGURE 3. *Evolution of the gender assignment system in Judeo-Spanish*

To conclude, the evolution of gender assignment in Judeo-Spanish is part of a long list of linguistic innovations that the language developed in isolation from the Iberian Peninsula. Whereas most researchers like to equate Judeo-Spanish with Old Spanish, the language contains numerous phonological, lexical, and morphosyntactic innovations (such as gender) that contrast sharply with their

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Peninsular counterpart. Gender assignment in Judeo-Spanish evolved from its original Romance pattern due to the extraordinary number of loanwords from other languages which display different or no gender assignment systems.

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