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**A linguistic sketch of Judeo-Piedmontese
and what it tells us about Piedmontese Jews'
origins***

Abstract: Judeo-Piedmontese (also called Lason Akodesh) is a virtually extinct dialect spoken by the Jewish communities that settled in Piedmont from the 14th century onward. The article takes into account the two historical stages usually recognized for Judeo-Italian varieties, namely the Medieval and the Modern one. As regards Judeo-Piedmontese, the only testimony of the former period is the *Glossario di Alba* by Jacob ben Nathan de Olmo; while more data, still limited in quantity, is available for the Modern period. Through the analysis of some relevant morpho-syntactic traits, Judeo-Piedmontese is shown to be a conservative Piedmontese variety, exhibiting some interesting Provençal-Ligurian features. Thus, on the basis of linguistic data too, it is possible to claim that the Jewish communities that settled in Piedmont might have come from Provence and Liguria.

Keywords: Jewish varieties, morpho-syntax, Piedmontese, religiolects

Dialetti delle comunità ebraiche, morfosintassi, piemontese, religioletti

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1 The choice of a glottonym

Despite what one can read in many works on the topic, the varieties spoken by Jews in the territory of Italy are not dialects of Italian.¹ In fact, only Bagitto (or Judeo-Livornese, Marchi 1993, 257–361), Judeo-Florentine (Massariello Merzagora 1977, 50–54), Judeo-Pitiglianese (Massariello Merzagora 1977, 61s.) and Judeo-Roman (ib., 62–70) might be considered dialects of Italian, since their structural distance from Italian *per se* is limited. On the contrary Judeo-Piedmontese “is as unintelligible to a Roman Jew as Piedmontese is to any central or south Italian” (Jochnowitz 1981, 108).² This also holds for Judeo-Piedmontese and Italian or, for instance, Judeo-Modenan and Italian: they are not mutually comprehensible and thus must be regarded as (varieties of) different languages.

Thus, we depart from the proposal to maintain the term Judeo-Italian (firstly introduced by Belleli 1904) to indicate all the language varieties spoken in Italy by a specifically-individuated social group, i.e. that of Jews. This proposal was put forward by virtue of the supposed common socio-cultural, economic and linguistic history of the Jewish communities in relation with each other and with the surrounding environment (Cuomo 1983, 437). This does not actually hold true as far as the economic and socio-cultural history is concerned (see §2), and even less when one thinks of the linguistic *côté*. Nonetheless we do not use the glottonym Italkian (coined by Birnbaum 1942), mainly for the very same reason discussed above: we cannot speak of Italkian or Judeo-Italian because, from the strict point of view of linguistics, there is no such thing as one and one only language spoken by Italian Jews. Instead, there are, or there have been, varieties of several Italo-Romance languages peculiar to the Jewish groups that settled in the various regions of Italy.

This paper focuses on Lason Akodesh, as its speakers called it (from Hebrew *lašon haqodeš*, ‘the sacred language’, see Levi 1975; Jochnowitz 1981), or Judeo-Piedmontese (henceforth JP), i.e. the variety of Piedmontese spoken by the Jews of Piedmont from their settlement in various towns of the region until the 20th century. The term JP is used in what follows because it is more widespread in the literature.

1 Throughout this paper ‘dialect’ is used as a synonym of ‘diaphasic, diastratic and/or diatopic variety of a language’. In the Italian and European (sociolinguistic) tradition, which we will not follow here, the term *dialetto* is a false friend, since it is mainly used to designate all the non-national languages spoken in the Italian peninsula (cf. Grassi/Sobrero/Telmon 1997, 3–31).

2 Some authors (e.g. Grassi/Sobrero/Telmon 2003, 85) do not even consider Judeo-Piedmontese and other varieties spoken in the Italian Jewish communities as Romance languages, and give them more or less the same status of Romani linguistic varieties.

Salminen (2007, 225) describes all the varieties of Jews that are spoken in Italy as moribund, and estimates very few remaining fluent speakers, all living on the island of Corfu. In our opinion, JP is today virtually extinct given the reduction of the Piedmontese Jewish community (which includes approx. 1000 people) and the attitude of Italian Jews towards not identifying their current socio-cultural autonomy with any linguistic difference in the Italian panorama (Cuomo 1983, 450). Furthermore, the dramatic decrease of speakers that affected Piedmontese, whose number, now approx. 700,000 (Regis 2012, 93), dropped by more than 75% in the last 80 years, did not help to maintain a dialect like JP alive.

In the following sections we briefly give a socio-historical sketch of the Jewish communities of Piedmont (§2), then observe some relevant morpho-syntactic and lexical features of JP (§3), whose origin and areal distribution will also be discussed. Finally (§4 and 5), we will try to answer to two research questions: (a) from the sociolinguistic viewpoint, how can be JP categorized, and (b) on the basis of linguistic evidence, where did Jews of Piedmont come from?

2 The history of Jewish communities in Piedmont

Reconstructing the origins of the Jewish communities of Piedmont is not an easy task. Some sources document a Jewish community in Turin as early as 4th century AD (Sacerdoti/Tedeschi/Falco 2003, 11), where a synagogue was established in 5th century AD (Calimani 2013, 95); and a Jewish community settled in Asti in 9th century AD until the expulsion decreed by King Louis II the Younger in 855 (ib., 115). Anyway, it is impossible to speak of a proper stable settlement until the beginning of the 15th century, following the expulsions from France (1306, 1322 and 1394). We consider the history of Jews in Piedmont related to the lands on Italian side of the Western Alps, from time to time subdued to the Duchy of Savoia (Cavaglioni 2010, 33). In this perspective the first settlement was in Savigliano, then in the surroundings and finally in Turin (1424). We can certainly assume that in 1430 the number of Jewish settlements in Piedmont was relevant since the Duke Amadeus VIII the Peaceful (1383–1451) promulgated the *Statuta Sabaudiae*, a comprehensive law-code whose aim was to define the status of Jews and their relationship with the Reign and the Christian population.

Along with bank loaners, merchants of wheat and other agricultural products (Woolf 2008, 12) the Piedmontese communities also hosted scholars such as Rabbi Yehiel Raphael Bellin (1375–1450), known as the “light of the exile” and Josef Colon Maharik, an important thinker and Rabbi of pupils from all the Italian territory, Savoy and Germanic Empire. According to Gedalia Ibn Yahya’s *Šalšelet ha-kabbalah*, some 30 Jewish scholars lived in Piedmont in the 15th century,

studying the Talmud, the Bible and legal codes, in particular Moše ben Maimon's *Mišneh Torah*, the midrashic literature, the kabbalah (Woolf 2008, 41). Piedmontese scholars were strongly influenced by French praxeis, as shown by the responses issued in that period as well as the rite called APAM, an acronym indicating the particular way of cantillating used only in the cities of Asti, Fossano (Phossan) and Moncalvo (Allegra/Cuccia/Kaminski, 2010, 259–279).

During 1500s, Piedmont is overwhelmed by the bloody strife between France and Spain. Despite the menaces of temporary and permanent expulsions (notably in 1560, when the decree of expulsion issued by the Duke Emmanuel Philibert (1528–1580) was retired only through the intermediary of Margaret of Valois), in the middle of the century 300/400 Jews were living under the Savoy dynasty, a few less in the Monferrato and a hundred in the Marquisate of Saluces (Milano 1963, 273). The *Glossario di Alba*, the only known JP Medieval text (see §3.1), was written during these years.

After 1560 Emanuele Filiberto's attitude changed and Jews became the only lenders of the Reign of Piedmont, as was already the case in the near Monferrato governed by Gonzaga. Banks in the hands of Jews flourished in Piedmontese big and small towns and, after the annexation of the Marquisate of Saluces in 1601, grew up to the number of 100 in 1624 (Milano 1963, 275). This brought new waves of Jewish immigrants into Piedmont, and gave Jews an important economic role. Perhaps the latter is one of the reasons why Jews were not ghettoized in Turin until 1679 (whereas in the rest of the Italian peninsula Jews were segregated some 100 years before), and until the 1720s in the other towns of Piedmont. This claims against the alleged common socio-cultural and linguistic history of the Jewish communities that lived all over the Italian territory.

Furthermore, unlike in the rest of Italy, in Piedmont Jews were evenly distributed throughout the region and even small towns had their *Università Israelitica*, their ghettos and synagogues: in 1761 there was a total of 4200 Jews living in Piedmont (Bachi 1938).

With the annexation of Piedmont to Napoleonic France (1802), for the span of fourteen years, Jews were allowed to practice unreservedly their religion and even to move out of the ghetto. On March 1, 1816, however, a royal decree restored the ghetto, and its inhabitants were again forbidden to attend public schools and exercise any liberal profession reserved to graduated people.

The period following the Emancipation can be defined as the Golden Era of Jews in Piedmont, with the community living a full integration and contributing to Italian history in a determinative way. This participation was an increasingly characteristic quality of Piedmontese Judaism, as opposed to other Italian Jewish communities. Thanks to their political commitment and struggle for freedom during the *Risorgimento*, from 1845 onward the different Jewish communities

were able to raise the awareness of the Jewish Question in front of the public opinion. Their actions, supported by the chief Rabbi of Turin, progressive Lelio Cantoni, influential politicians Roberto and Massimo d'Azeglio and jurist Luigi Guglielmo Maffoni, exert the right pressure on King Carlo Alberto (1798–1849), whose *Statuto* (dated March 25, 1848) declared the Jews finally emancipated. After this year it is possible to posit a kind of fracture between the elder and the youngster elements of the Jewish community, i.e. between the elder JP speakers and the youngsters, who – as we will see – exhibit linguistic features that are more similar to the Piedmontese dialect spoken by the Goyim.

3 Judeo-Piedmontese from a linguistic point of view

JP, and generally speaking all the varieties spoken by Jews in Italian settlements, registered in its own history two distinct moments of development: a first period, spanning from the early Middle Age to the Late Renaissance (Cuomo 1983, 429; Moriggi 2008, 44), and a second one, the so-called “Modern period” (17th to the 19th century, Cuomo 1983, 433). In the history of JP it is thus possible to trace a development line starting from a medieval situation of strongly Jewish linguistic identity to a Modern-Contemporary Age characterized by a progressive dissolution of their original identity. The evidence for this phenomenon is found primarily in the abandonment of Hebrew script: while all Medieval Jewish texts written in an Italo-Romance vernacular are in Hebrew alphabet, the texts of the Modern period are mostly written with Latin alphabet. They also have a completely different nature (ib.): there are no more Biblical glosses, glossaries, vocabularies, and so on, but just lists of words and expressions typically used by Jewish people while speaking their dialectal variety in their everyday life. Furthermore, we find also many literary texts, comedies and poetry written to testify a sort of ethnographic portrait, with the aim of offering to Jewish (and non-Jewish) readers a pretty picture of a picturesque scenery.

Directly connected to the historical question, a long debate took place about the existence of a Jewish Italian koiné, allegedly formed during the 13th and 14th centuries on the patterns of Southern Italo-Romance varieties (namely Salentino and – to some extent – Pugliese). This hypothesis remounts to Cassuto (1934, 107) and implies a unidirectionality of the spread of Italian Jewish communities. From South, they moved North, where – in the territories surrounded by Tuscan or Gallo-Italic languages – Jews should have slowly dismissed their original linguistic habits keeping in some way the traces of the early Southern unity.

Nonetheless, Terracini (1956, 257) had a sceptical attitude towards this conception of a Jewish koiné, albeit maintaining the existence of two different stages of development in the diachronic evolution of the so called “Judeo-Italian”. He does not discuss the Southern features in the early vulgar languages spoken by Jewish communities in the North of the Peninsula. Jochnowitz (s.d.a) notes that the aforementioned development can easily account for the main differences between, e.g., Judeo-Mantuan and Goyish Mantuan, but it is absolutely useless if one tries to apply it to JP, since JP shows features clearly tied to a Gallo-Italic, and specifically Piedmontese or Ligurian, background. According to Jochnowitz, this is due to the language shift from Judeo-Provençal that should have taken place very early, maybe in the 15th century, without passing through any Italian Jewish koiné or Southern influence.

3.1 Medioeval JP

The only JP text among the Judeo-Italian manuscripts of the late Middle Age and Renaissance is a glossary, usually called *Glossario di Alba* or *Glossary A* (Terracini 1956, 255), written in the year 1567 by Jacob ben Nathan de Olmo for Shemayà Baruch Benedetti in the town of Alba. Alba, the chief town of the historical sub-region known as Langhe, lays in the southwest of Piedmont, in the province of Cuneo, not far from today’s French and Ligurian borders.

Glossary A is kept in the library of Jewish Theological Seminary of New York. It has been studied by Berenblut (1949) whose work embeds a complete transcription in Latin alphabet of the manuscript, which was originally in Hebrew script. This transcription (ib., 274–282) shows a number of words and expressions strongly oriented towards a Piedmontese model. Suffice it to mention <qonti> ‘with you’, <lapart> ‘the part’, <eldid> ‘the finger’, <la lengva> ‘the tongue’, <travaljii> ‘work’, <vent> ‘wind’, <repoz> ‘rest’, <dliovi> ‘some eggs’, <juvu> ‘yoke’, <qun nui> ‘with us’, <inlapiasa> ‘in the square’, <parland> ‘speaking’.³ In each term one can easily identify the modern Piedmontese forms *con ti* (i.e. [kun 'ti]), *la part*, *ël dil*, *la lengua*, *travaj*, *vent*, *arpòs* (i.e. [ar'pɔz]), *dj'euv*, *giov* (i.e. [dʒuw]), *con noi* (i.e. [kun'nuj]), *an la piassa* (i.e. [ənlə 'pjasa]), *parland*.

³ *Glossary A* gives evidence for the phonetic changes that were in progress in to-date’s Piedmontese. For instance, /ɔ/, /o/ and /u/ are represented sometimes by <o>, sometimes by <u>, revealing an on-going change in the vocalic system. In the followings, when we do not directly quote JP sentences of other texts and authors, we will use for JP the classic orthography of Piedmontese, namely the one systematized by Pacotto (1930).

In other words, the language attested by the *Glossary A* is plain Piedmontese, although it shows many interesting features of what we will define (Medieval) JP. For example, the ending for plural feminine nouns is *-i*, as we can see in <liqordi> ‘the strings’, <liroqi> ‘the stones’, <frii> ‘wounds’; the negation morpheme is preverbal *nun*, as attested by the gloss <nunne> ‘it is not’; the etymological intervocalic plosives like [k], [t] or [p] are reduced to sounded counterparts [g], [d] or [b] much more frequently than to zero degree (for velars and dentals) or spirant [v] instead of labials. So we find <šed> and not *sèj*, ‘thirst’, <sadula> and not *sàula*, ‘full up’, <listradi> and not *le strà*, ‘the paths’, <log> and not *leu*, ‘place’, <laberi> and not *làver*, ‘lips’, <ligasi> and not *liasse*, ‘knots’, and so on. Sometimes the script keeps the etymological consonants like in <sapemu> and not *soma*, ‘we know’.

That’s worth a little inquiry. In today’s Piedmont, only some Occitan varieties show the conservation of [p] in the verb descendants of Latin *sapere*. Furthermore, Occitan dialects never palatalize the infinite ending of first conjugation verbs, that keep the form in *-ar*: *parlar*, *chantar*, *anar* instead of Piedmontese *parlé*, *canté*, *andé*.

In the *Glossary* the correspondent form always ends in *-ar*: <šquruçar> ‘to shorten’, <aguaštar> ‘to waste’, <parlar> ‘to speak’, <dupiar> ‘to double’, <giağunar> ‘to fast’, <astar> ‘to sit down’, <inlotrovar> ‘in finding him’. On the other hand, there is no case of palatalization. This is not enough to claim evidence for a Provençal model, because *-ar* endings are widely spread in Canavesan dialects of Northern Piedmont and they are normal for Ligurian dialects, especially around Ventimiglia in Western Riviera. Other features, in fact, let us think to a possible Ligurian influence: forms like <qveštu> ‘that’, <štanga> ‘bar’, <šenera> ‘ash’, <šqiapera> ‘he will break’, <šeaqeštu> ‘if that’ could sound very similar to correspondent forms attested in today’s Western Ligurian dialects: for Monaco, e.g., Arveiller (1967, 368s.) registers <sciafesà> ‘to slap’ (<sc-> represents the cluster of [ʃ] and [tʃ]), <sciapà> ‘to break’, <sciorta> ‘sort’, and so on. And Monaco seems to be “less Ligurian” than other Intemelian dialects, because (according to Arveiller 1967, 285–289) it does not show the generalized change from [s] to [ʃ], even before plosives, widely attested for example in Brigasque (Bologna 1991) where we find <quèšta> ‘that’, <štanga> ‘bar’, <š-ciapà> ‘to break’ (but not <šenera>, that sounds <sendř>). However, it is not clear if in the *Glossary* the *šin* stands for [ʃ] or for [s] (Berenblut 1949, 28), so it is not possible to decide how much Ligurian ‘color’ the spelling of these forms could show to ears.

In <šqiapera> there is another interesting linguistic fact to observe: unlike the other Judeo-Italian manuscripts, *Glossary A* uses *qof* followed by *yod* for transcribing [tʃ], “imitating the Italian orthography” (Berenblut 1949, 28). If this is the correct spelling, we have in the *Glossary* many examples of palatalization of

etymological clusters like CL: <qiama> ‘call’, <sqiapa> ‘break’, and this phenomenon has no place in any Occitan variety, but it is typical of Piedmontese, Ligurian and Lombard (Loporcaro 2009, 85).

3.2 Modern JP

Previous accounts of modern JP did not delve into the description of the defining morpho-syntactic features of JP vis à vis Piedmontese itself. Scattered notes can be found in Jochnowitz (1981, 110–116) but in fact JP does not offer any significant difference from the varieties of Piedmontese spoken by Goyim. “Judeo-Piedmontese is closer to Piedmontese than its neighboring Jewish dialects are to their respective surrounding dialects” (Jochnowitz s.d.a).

Bachi (1929) and Diena (1980; 1986) are more concerned with lexical peculiarities rather than morpho-syntax, possibly because lexicon is the part of language more accessible to naïve speakers and lexical differences are more evident to them. Lexical borrowings from Hebrew are taken into account also by Terracini (1938), but he does not fail to investigate with accuracy morpho-syntax, too. His analysis of JP is largely maintained by Massariello Merzagora (1977, 12–24).

A wide panorama on the dialects spoken by Italian Jews is also offered by Aprile (2010; 2012; 2013). Since these works are part of a reference grammar, though, they summarize the state of research on JP.

3.2.1 Syntax: Sentence negation

Sentence negation and the development of its syntax have been widely studied during the last century, starting from the classic Jespersen (1917). With regard to Romance and Semitic languages, both Latin and Biblical Hebrew had preverbal negation (see 1a–b). Romance languages, on the other hand, developed different negation strategies, namely discontinue negation (2) and simple post-verbal negation (3). The latter is the one displayed ever since 1800 in Piedmontese koiné.

- (1) a. Latin (Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* I,42)
Non *respuit* *condicionem*
 NEG refuse.PST.3S condition
 ‘he did not refuse the condition’

- b. Biblical Hebrew (*Judges* 21,1)

לֹא־נָתַתְּ בְּתוּרָתוֹ לְבִנְיָמִן לְאִשָּׁה

lo’-yitten bittô l^evinyamin l^eiššah
NEG-give.IMPF.3S daughter-of.him to.Benjamin as.a.wife

‘There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife’

- (2) French

Je ne dis pas ça
I NEG say.PRS.1S NEG this

‘I’m not saying this’

- (3) Piedmontese

Mi i lo cato nen
I scl.1s it buy.PRS.1s NEG

‘I’m not buying it’

As regards JP, it seems arguable that elder speakers consistently used preverbal [nun] or [nun] (graphically represented by <noun>, <nôn> or simply <non>: see 4).

- (4) a. Judeo-Piedmontese (Goria 2005, 14)

Joto non dis altra ragon
J. NEG say.PRS.3s other reason

‘Joto does not say anything else’

- b. Judeo-Piedmontese (Terracini 1938, 171)

noun veui dilo
NEG want.PRS.1s say.INF.it

‘I do not want to say it’

In this connection it is worth noting that, in the Purim Spiel *Majà tra magna e nvouda* reported in Terracini (1938), the niece (i.e. the younger character of the poem) uses, when replying to one of her aunt’s reproaches, post-verbal [neŋ], graphically <nen> (see 5), that is the standard negation form of Piedmontese koiné (see 3); while her aunt sticks to preverbal <noun> (see 4b).

- (5) Judeo-Piedmontese (Terracini 1938, 172)

Soun pi nen i temp d na vota
be.PRS.3p more NEG the times of a time

‘times just are not what they used to be’

In the linguistic atlases at our disposal, the lexotype ‘non’ is attested (AIS, cc. 653 and 1658) at Airole, in the Roya Valley on the political border between Liguria and the French Département des Alpes Maritimes. In Piedmont, according to Terracini (1938, 175), it is possible to find preverbal ‘non’ in the area of the High Monferrato, as shown by several popular songs collected in Ferraro (1870), where more than twenty preverbal ‘nun’ (written <nun>) are attested. It must be borne in mind that

Piedmontese popular songs often offer a sort of mixed language, with many words, and even morpho-syntactical features, borrowed from other neighbouring languages, such as French or Italian. Besides, the High Monferrato area around Ovada exhibits Ligurian features, which sometimes also appear in the *Canti popolari monferrini*. Preverbal negation is attested today in Southern Piedmontese dialects (Parry 2013; Duberti/Regis 2014), and was normal all over the region at least until the 17th century. Anyway, in these dialects the form of the preverbal negator is always [no], [nə] or [n], and never [nun]. One of Francesco Testore's poems written in the JP variety of Alessandria (cf. Diena 1982) offers a striking example of the contrast between the JP 'nun' and the contemporary Goy form 'n(è)', followed by the postverbal negator 'mica'. In the 1837 sonnet *La gata persa* (Testore 1982, 50) two characters are on stage: *la Sòra Isté*, a Jewish woman complaining about her missing she-cat, and a Christian passer-by trying to explain why the she-cat does not want to come back home (with a joke: the pet will not come home because in a Jewish house there is no lard!).

What is of interest for us is the fact that the two characters (more or less as in the *Majà tra magna e nvouda*) use two different dialects. *La Sòra Isté* speaks JP and always uses preverbal 'nun' for sentence negation (four times in nine verses, see 6); the Goy, whose speech occupies just two verses, speaks a Monferrino variety characterized by rhotacism of [l], by a richer system of clitics, and by a preverbal negator [n] (see 7):

- (6) Judeo-Piedmontese (Testore 1982, 50)
mé la serch, e non l' ho ancor trovada
 I her search.PRS.1S and NEG her have.PRS.1S yet found.F
 'I'm looking for her, and still have not found her'
- (7) Piedmontese (Testore 1982, 50)⁴
parché che an cà dij abré n' i é meja 'd lard
 because COMP in house of.the Jews NEG there is NEG of lard
 'because in the house of Jews there is no lard'

Moreover, the opposition between the JP negation form and other forms, even preverbal, collected in the oriental varieties spoken by non-Jewish people does not seem to be a matter of diatopical variation limited to the Piedmontese area: for instance, in Judeo-Mantuan (Massariello Merzagora 1977, 29) the sentence negation strategy of the Jewish dialect differs from the one attested in the

⁴ In other poems of Testore's <non> appears also before vowels, e.g. *nonè costa una bala* (Testore 1982, 51). The only example of a simple post-verbal negation in this collection (*mé nòmin nent*) is probably due to poetical reasons, since it occurs at the very end of a verse, rhyming with *gent*.

Christian dialect (preverbal *non* vs postverbal *mi(g)a*, respectively). This is probably due to a conservative tendency typical, in linguistic terms, to strictly-separated and closed communities. Nonetheless it might also be due to contact, since the model represented by Biblical Hebrew might have helped JP speakers to maintain the original preverbal position even after they had migrated from their first settlements. Hebrew influence on JP was for sure stronger than Latin influence on Piedmontese, because the higher degree of literacy shown by Jewish communities granted to all their members an everyday contact with Hebrew structures while only a few number of Christians were able to read and understand Latin (as well as Italian, at least at some extent).

Arguably, only in the late-19th century, with the rapid secularization of the young generations, JP shifted to a post-verbal negation strategy, i.e. to the “standard” negation strategy of Turin-based koiné. Before this shift, JP usual negation was strictly preverbal, a condition shared with Latin, ancient Piedmontese varieties – as said – and, synchronically, with Ligurian, that is the language spoken in Liguria, an Italian region bordering with Southern Piedmont.

3.2.1.1 Negator-clitic order

JP sentence negation syntax is interesting not only because preverbal negation displays a Ligurian pattern rather than a Piedmontese one. Take into consideration example (8):

- (8) Judeo-Piedmontese (Terracini 1938, 170)
- | | | | | | |
|-----------|------------|----------|--------------|-------------|----------------|
| <i>sa</i> | <i>non</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>veuli</i> | <i>esse</i> | <i>sgiaflà</i> |
| if | NEG | SCL.2S | want.PRS.2S | be.INF | slapped |
- ‘if you do not want to get slapped’

Here, the negative morpheme precedes the verb, but also the subject clitic. The same happens in some Ligurian varieties, e.g. Ventimigliese *nu ti saj* (‘you do not know’, Azaretti 1977, 237): in these varieties the negative morpheme also precedes prevocalic 3rd singular and plural subject clitic *l*, but follows *u*, *a* and *i*, respectively 3rd singular masculine, feminine, and 3rd plural subject clitics (Parry 1997, 248).

In JP ‘non’ precedes *l* (*noun l’é vera*, ‘it is not true’, Terracini 1938, 171) but also other 3rd person clitics, see *Joséf [...] non al veul lassela li* ‘J. does not want to let it go’; *s’ non as fùissa intromess* ‘if he had not interfered’ (Goria 2005, 14s.).⁵

⁵ In Testore (1982) the presence of *non* rules out the presence of subject clitics, except for rare occurrences of *non l’é* and reflexive *s* (*non ’s poul de*). As for *l’é*, already in premodern Piedmontese *l* is a “functional useless element”, thus no longer being a subject clitic (provided it ever was, in Piedmontese) (Tosco 2002).

On the contrary, in diachronically/diatopically marked varieties of Piedmontese, the negative preverbal morpheme always follows the clitic, and even Liguarian varieties spoken in Southern Piedmont have undergone this change: e.g. Ormea, *ti 'n voròì crazo ciù a l'òso ch'a mi* ('you will not believe the donkey rather than me!', Colombo 1986, XVI).

3.2.1.2 Other negative items

The cycle of negation interested also other lexical JP items, that grammaticalized, at least to some extent, as negative polarity items (NPI). This is a usual development for words originally used to reinforce negation in routinized expressions (as is the case for French *pas* and Piedmontese *nen*, and – even though to a lesser extent – Italian *affatto*, Bernini/Ramat 1996; Parry 2013).

In JP, the NPI that developed from formulaic expressions is *davar*, literally 'word', but also 'thing', which has lost its semantic meaning and became a NPI, as it is evident from 8:⁶

- (9) Judeo-Piedmontese (Diena 1986, 235)
- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|
| <i>cula</i> | <i>lì</i> | <i>'ossa</i> | <i>davar</i> |
| that | there | make.PRS.3s | nothing |
| 'that one does not make anything' | | | |

The routinized expression that gave rise to a new NPI was *dabra davar* ('shut up!, don't speak!', Bachi 1929, 34), itself in turn a reduction of the negative imperative form [nun 'dabra da'var], literally 'NEG say-IMP.2s word'. It is interesting, in this connection, that the formulaic expression at issue is an imperative form conveying the meaning of 'hush', i.e. a form connected to the necessity of signal a danger and of secretness (and to the necessity of hush), a feature that is peculiar to jargons and parageral varieties (Vigolo 2010).

3.2.2 Morphology: feminine singular

Besides Romance morphology, where feminine is usually marked by suffixes such as *-a* (< Latin *-A(M)*), with nouns and adjectives: Pied. *gat* vs *gata* 'cat vs she-cat'; *bel*

⁶ The word for 'thing' is particularly prone to grammaticalize as a postverbal sentence negator, precisely through bridging contexts such as the one in 9. This happened e.g. in Pietraporzio Occitan (where the negator is *ren* < Lat. *rem* 'thing', cf. AIS, c. 653, p. 170), in Moroccan Arabic (*š(i)* < Classical Arabic *šay*, Lucas 2013), and in Augila Berber (where *-ka* and *kra* are used, both deriving from *kîra* '(some)thing', Brugnatelli 1987, 54).

vs *bela* ‘nice [m. vs f.]’) and *-ëssa* (< Latin *-issa*(M)), only with nouns: *medich* vs *medichëssa* ‘male vs female doctor’), a number of JP words collected in the glossaries (Bachi 1929; Terracini 1938; Massariello Merzagora 1977 and 1980; Diena 1980 and 1986; Cavaglioni 2008) seem to inflect following Semitic patterns. Two suffixes drew the attention of scholars (see e.g. Massariello Merzagora 1977, 15).

The first one is *-tâ*, which is found, for instance, in JP *ghevirtâ* ‘mistress’, feminine form of *ghevir*, ‘master’ (ib.) and in JP *chelavtâ*, feminine form of *chelev*, ‘bad’ (Diena 1986, 285). The total number of words that in JP texts and glossaries inflect following this pattern is around a dozen: JP *‘irontâ* ‘rich (f.)’, JP *chamòrtâ* ‘she-ass’, JP *chavertâ* ‘female servant’, JP *chasirtâ* ‘sow’, JP *chelavtâ*, JP *ganavtâ* ‘female thief’, JP *ghevirtâ*, JP *mamzertâ* ‘wicked (f.)’, JP *pon-altâ* ‘countrywoman’, JP *pegartâ* ‘dead (f.)’, JP *tefaltâ* ‘old (f.)’.

The widespread presence of feminine *-tâ* in other Judeo-Italo-Romance dialects signals an Aramaic origin for this suffix (see Massariello Merzagora 1977, 15; Aprile 2012, 33). It is worth noting that this suffix (derived from the Feminine Emphatic State’s ending) is analogically applied also to bases for which the *-tâ* feminine has scarce, if any, attestations in Biblical and post-Biblical Aramaic documents, cf. *ganavtâ*, almost unattested in Aramaic, which is the “regular” JP feminine form of *ganav/ganau* ‘thief’ (Aprile 2012, 33).

It has been proposed that the spreading of this suffix might also have been favoured by the presence of the Romance feminine suffix *-tâ* (< Latin *-tate*(M)) for the formation of abstract nouns such as Pied. *ossietà* ‘society’, *libertâ* ‘freedom’, *siviltâ* ‘civilization’ etc., but it is in fact impossible to say whether the presence of the homophonous Romance suffix really influenced JP, since no abstract feminine noun in our texts appears to be formed via the juxtaposition of Aramaic *-tâ* to a Semitic basis or to a Romance basis. Few examples of this kind are found, though, in Judeo-Roman (ib.).

The second Semitic feminine suffix used in JP originates from and is homophonous with the Hebrew feminine adjectival suffix *-â*. In JP glossaries, the words formed via juxtaposition of *-â* are: JP *‘arelâ/‘irlâ* (< JP *‘arel*, ‘non-Hebrew’), JP *arorâ* (< JP *aror*, ‘bad’), JP *chassidâ* (< JP *chassid*, ‘pious’), JP *ghibenâ* (< JP *ghiben*, ‘hunchbacked’), JP *goiâ/gôiâ* (< JP *gôi*, ‘non-Hebrew, Christian’), JP *gofâ* (< JP *gof*, ‘poorly dressed’), JP *hastulâ* (< JP *hastul*, ‘fiancé’), JP *iafâ* (< JP *iaf*, ‘nice’), JP *tovâ* (< JP *tov*, ‘good’). Except for three cases (in which lexicalization rather than inflection seems to be involved),⁷ and for *emâ* ‘mother’, whose Hebrew form *em*

7 Namely *pegherâ* ‘death’, perhaps the feminine form of *pegher* ‘poor devil, dead’; *banâ* ‘daughter’ < *ben* ‘son’; and *Haisâ/Heisâ* ‘Virgin Mary’, literally ‘that woman’, analogically formed on *ha’iš* ‘Jesus’, literally ‘the man’ (Diena 1986, 236s.).

seems to have been analogically suffixed with a feminine marker (attested also in Aramaic), the *-â*-suffixed JP words are only adjectives.

What is striking considering these adjectives is the fact that all the inflected adjectives that the glossaries indicate as truly Judeo-Piedmontese forms inflect along this pattern. In other words, in JP no Hebrew-derived adjectives have a Romance inflected feminine. Thus, although the total number of ‘Hebrew’ adjectives in JP was scarce, Hebrew morphology was fairly vital at the time glossaries were collected.⁸

This does not hold true for feminine noun morphology. There is at least a case of possible double (i.e. Hebrew and Romance) suffixation: along with JP *ganavtà*, the form JP *ganavëssa* is also attested for ‘female thief’. Moreover, there are (rare) cases of ‘Hebrew’ nouns which form the feminine with a Romance suffix: JP *sahirëssa* ‘witch’, probably from JP *sahir* ‘soldier’ (Hebrew שׂוּדֵיר) + *ëssa*; JP *robissa* or *rabinëssa* ‘Rabbi’s wife’, from JP *robi/rabin* ‘Rabbi’ + (*ë*)*ssa* (Terracini 1938, 180); JP *hadanëssa* ‘bride’, from JP *hadan* ‘groom’+ *ëssa* (note that Hebrew for ‘bride’ is *challàh*); JP *haiatëssa* ‘seamstress’, from JP *haiat* ‘tailor’+ *ëssa* (Diena 1980; 1986).

3.2.3 Feminine plurals

In Eastern Piedmontese the plural feminine marker for first-declension nouns and adjectives is *-i* (Telmon 2001, 66, 71). The same holds also for JP since its first attestations, as we have shown above (§3.1).⁹ It has to be noted that this is not only a morphological, but also a phonetic distinctive feature that involves all unstressed final *-e* of koiné, particularly clitics. Compare 10 and 11:

- (10) Piedmontese Koiné
le fomme a l’han vist-me
 the women scl.3p have.PRS.3p seen-me
 ‘Women have seen/saw me’

⁸ What is more, although Piedmontese displays phonetic alternations, by virtue of which e.g. Latin *Ō* becomes [o] if stressed, [u] if unstressed (even in the same root: *pòrta* [ˈpɔrta] ‘bring (you)!’ vs *porté* [purˈte] ‘bring (you all)!’); JP feminine adjectives may not change the root vowel: *gòì* ‘non-Hebrew, Christian (m.)’ ~ *gòjà* or *gòjà* [gɔj / gɔˈja / guˈja] ‘non-Hebrew, Christian (f.)’ (Diena 1980, 178s.). Unknown to Piedmontese koiné, this feature is regular in many provincial varieties like the dialect of Mondovì.

⁹ Curiously, we can find the same pattern in another variety of Piedmontese, i.e. the Sinto-Piedmontese spoken by Gypsies settled in Piedmont and France (Duberti 2010, 67).

- (11) High Monferrato Piedmontese
i doni j' han vist-mi
 the women scl.3p have.prs.3p seen-me
 'Women have seen/saw me'

It seems arguable, then, that the feminine ending *-i* is due to regular phonetic change that took place in the Piedmontese varieties at issue. It has probably nothing to do with the supposed influence of a Jewish (Medieval) koiné.¹⁰

-i for unstressed *-e* is pervasively present in Gorla (2005) and in Testore's (1982) verses. To limit ourselves to some examples, in the former text one reads *i poli, sui spali, a gambi alvâ, tropi peni*; in the latter *tanti ròbi, dij conquisti, tuti contradansi e dansi fini, dij pròvi, dij pretesi, ij lasagni, ij voladi, dij piumi, dij meravij*, and so on. This feature seems to be well-established in JP to the extent that in Terracini's (1938) *Majà tra magna e nvouda*, where the Piedmontese is more strongly influenced by the Turin-based koiné, clitic pronouns more often display final *-i* rather than 'standard' *-e*: *scusmi tant, soun educami, soun adatami vs veuj divertime*. Note also that in the *Majà* all feminine plural endings of I declension nouns are in *-e*: *le fie* (used thrice), *smorfie e ambissioun, tute le scole, le cose, gnoche e patamole, le lobbie, chonouse, brave e rispetouse*.

4 What's Judeo-Piedmontese, then?

It is not our own aim to definite the status of JP by a sociolinguistic point of view. Thus, we will establish that it can be seen as an example of language mixing, but just in a naïve sense and not according the criteria of Auer (1999, 319ss.). JP shows many adapted borrowings exhibiting a Semitic stem with Piedmontese morphology (such as *achlé* < אָכַל + the infinitive marker of first conjugation verbs *-é* 'to eat', *dabré* < דַּבֵּר + *-é* 'to speak', *n-ainé* < עֵינַי 'eye' + *-é* 'to watch'), although Semitic morphology was still somewhat vital, see §3.2.2. It is not easy to define whether these borrowings have to be considered as pure hybrids, usage borrowings or system borrowings (Regis forthcoming). As it has been pointed out by Berruto (2006, 166s.) JP is to some extent the prototypical 'X-ized system', a label that can be applied to any linguistic system with a large amount of lexical (and sometimes morpho-syntactic) material given by any X different language. Thus, both JP and

¹⁰ The diffusion of feminine plural *-i* is not a unicum in the Judeo-Italo-Romance panorama: this is also attested in the Jewish varieties of Mantuan and Roman (Massariello Merzagora 1977, 27, 65).

Sinto-Piedmontese are ‘X-ized’ languages: for the first one X is Hebrew, for the second one Romani.

JP, like Sinto-Piedmontese and many other pararomani varieties, is a very problematic case (Berruto 2006, 166). These “symbiotic mixed languages” (Smith 1995; 2000) or “non self-contained mixture[s]” (Matras 2000) are not easy to distinguish from jargons (Berruto 2006), because many jargons were indeed “symbiotic mixed languages”, structurally parasitic of a system that hosts them, and gives them a morpho-syntactic architecture. In our opinion, the solution for this terminological impasse may be the adoption of the term “religiolect” (Hary/Wein 2013). A religiolect is any linguistic variety written or spoken by a religious or secularized community in connection with its religion. Thus, JP may be regarded as a Jewish religiolect, and indeed JP, although non-prototypically, seems to fit slightly well with the parameters proposed for this categorization (Hary/Wein 2013, 90–93). Medieval JP is, on the other hand, a quite good example of prototypical religiolect. Some clarifications are in order so that Modern and Medieval JP could be better defined within the range of Jewish religiolects.

First, as said, the one and only JP text written with Hebrew characters is the 16th-century *Glossary A*. The first examples of JP texts using the Latin alphabet and allegedly written by a member of the Jewish community dates back to the end of 1800 (Terracini 1938, 165). This is the *terminus ante quem* JP speakers switched to Latin script, after a possible period of competition between the latter and the Hebrew script. This is normal for Jewish languages and is the consequence of the secularization of the society, on the one hand, and of an increasing emancipation of Jews, on the other, since it symbolizes the possibility of coming in contact and mixing with Goyim and their tradition, as it happened for speakers and writers of Judeo-Spanish.

As all other Jewish languages, JP incorporates Hebrew and Aramaic elements – as we discussed in the Sections above. They are not limited to religious cultural lexicon, nor are they limited to the lexicon *stricto sensu*, in that sometimes they touch also upon the morpho-syntax of the borrowed words.

JP can also be treated as a jargon unintelligible to people that are outside the community. Although modern JP is not written with Hebrew characters – the easiest way to be unintelligible – some of its uses are clearly cryptolalic: for instance, Jewish tailors used to speak and count in JP in front of the costumers, in order to avoid being understood (Levi 1975; Diena 1980, 89ss.). Interestingly, since tailors’ assistants might also be Goyim, especially after 1848, it is arguable that JP had lived on for some time as tailors’ jargon without the religious connotation. Nonetheless, as we stated before, JP and Piedmontese *per se* are mutually intelligible.

Since the texts that we have collected for JP are mainly poetries, it is plausible to think that their intended audience was not limited to a Jewish audience, but Hary and Wein themselves consider this fact as “not as exclusive as had been assumed in the literature” (2013, 91). Even though the texts under scrutiny are written primarily for those who can understand JP, everyone who writes poetry intends as audience a large part of those who can read, and virtually everybody who can read.

Migrated dialectalisms are not surely part of JP, if by dialectalism we mean linguistic features typical of Southern Italo-Romance varieties (Hary/Wein 2013, 92). Of course, feminine plural endings in *-i* might be the remnants of a Medieval Jewish koiné, but it is more economic to think that the existence of this grammatical morpheme in the Medieval Jewish koiné might have helped to preserve the *-i* ending of feminine plural, which was the normal outcome of phonological change in south-eastern Piedmontese varieties.

The latter, and other morpho-syntactic features that we have discussed above, on the other hand, are examples of preservation of archaic forms, which is one of the defining features of a prototypical Jewish religiolect.

Finally, whereas modern JP does not include literary translation of the sacred texts (but Medieval JP did), its “reservoir of images, formulation, concepts and icons” (ib., 93) is derived from the Bible. Naturally, JP was indicated by its speakers by a different name, see §1 (this, of course, is not relevant from the strict linguistic point of view, but from the socio-cultural point of view).

The defining features of a religiolect as proposed by Hary and Wein are listed in Table 1. If the feature is present in modern JP, this is indicated by a +. If not, by a –. The same happens for the column representing Medieval JP.

Table 1: Features of a *Religiolect* according Hary/Wein (2012)¹¹

	JP	Medieval JP
1) Hebrew written form	–	+
2) Different scripts	–	+
3) Incorporate Hebrew and Aramaic	+	+
4) Distinct spoken form (jargon)	(+)	(+/-)
5) Writing only for a Jewish audience	+/-	+
6) Migrated or displaced dialectalisms	+	+
	JP	Medieval JP
7) Preservation of archaic forms	+	(+/-)
8) Different names for the variety	+	(+)
9) The reservoir of images is derived from Bible	+/-	+
10) Translation of sacred texts	–	+

¹¹ Bracketed pluses or minuses signal a reconstructed situation.

On the basis of §3, we can conclude that (a) JP was very similar to Southern Piedmontese varieties, among which it could be numbered; (b) the Gallo-Italic features of JP, directly oriented on Piedmontese patterns, are attested very early, since 16th century; and (c) crossing linguistic and historical evidence, it is possible to suppose a migration from Provence through West Ligurian and Southern Piedmontese territories. The latter point will be further discussed in §5.

5 Where did Piedmontese Jews come from?

As illustrated under §3.1, late Medieval JP already shows a clear Gallo-Italic orientation, and in particular an evident Piedmontese orientation, but keeps on maintaining some features that do not overlap with the so-called Medieval Jewish koiné. On the contrary, they seem to offer many traces of a double external model: Provençal, on the one hand, and Ligurian, on the other.

We have briefly discussed some of these features while tackling upon *Glossary A*, and some of them still remain unaltered in Modern JP until its extinction. Using *Glossary A* as a source for understanding where Piedmontese Jews could have come from, anyway, seems to be rather difficult. In order to be able to hypothesize the origin of Piedmontese Jews, we need to consider JP in all its attested history, from the earliest to the latest textual evidence.

Medieval JP, as attested by *Glossary A*, often maintains final *-u* as an ending for nouns and adjectives, such as most part of Ligurian varieties do (Forner 1988, 457): we thus find <qanbiu> ‘change’, <teštemoniū> ‘witness’, <altu> ‘high’. Ligurian varieties show verbal endings like *-amu*, *-emu*, *-imu* for the 1st plural person of indicative present tense, and so does Medieval JP: suffices it to cite <giaġuna-mu> ‘we fast’, <špremu> ‘we hope, we wait for’, <friimu> ‘we wound’. The conservation of three distinct forms, with a different thematic vowel for each conjugation, is not usual in today’s Ligurian varieties: Genoese, for instance, displays *-emu* for 1st and 2nd verb class, and *-imu* for the 3rd. Rather, it seems to fit with the system of Ancient Provençal (Dalbera 1994, 590), although with the maintenance, or with the restoration, of the final *-u*. Note also that the *-u*-ending does not appear consistently in Medieval JP and it has been completely erased in Modern JP, where virtually all masculine nouns and adjectives end with a consonant, such as in today’s Piedmontese varieties. Therefore, we can conclude that JP’s verbal system showed Provençal patterns with some superposition of Ligurian phonetic features, but these patterns and features disappeared and merged into “more Piedmontese” ones when Provençal and Piedmontese had the same evolution lines.

As regards negation, until the mid-19th century ‘non’ remained the only JP preverbal negator maintaining an evident Ligurian model rather than a Piedmon-

tese one. Furthermore, JP seems to maintain a conservative negator-clitic order, possibly even more conservative than Liguria's (and Piedmont's) more conservative dialects.

Since 16th-century Provençal had no subject clitics and had preverbal negation (Garavini 1970, 31), it is thus possible to speculate that Jewish refugees coming from Provence adopted the first clitic system they found on their way, i.e. the Ligurian one, with its position between negation and verb.

Also 16th-century Provençal, like Ancient Provençal, had a preverbal negator 'non'. Southern Provençal varieties maintained preverbal negation until recent times, cf. poems in Marseillan Provençal written by Margailan (1875, 61s). This is of some interest for our purposes. Marseille dialect is part of the South Occitan group that some scholars call *Provençau generau* (Sumien 2009, 16). Shuadit or Chouadit, i.e. Medieval Judeo-Provençal, was part of this group, belonging to the Rhodanian Provençal, or Rodanenc, branch (Aslanov 2001; Sumien 2009).

In this connection, the absence of palatalization in etymological *ka-*, *ga-* and the maintaining of intervocalic sounded explosive consonants like [b], [d] and [g] (see §3.1 again) are phenomena typically attested in Southern Occitan varieties. They are not attested in a Piedmontese environment, because Occitan varieties spoken in Piedmont belong to the Northern branch (Sumien 2009, 12–15). As we have already suggested, the correspondence between the tendencies of original Provençal variety and the features of Southern Piedmontese had as a consequence the maintaining of these features. This also holds for the reduction of consonant clusters like PL > [pj], attested in Shuadit, too (as in other rural varieties of Rodanenc), on which the model of Ligurian (and Southern Italo-Romance) varieties PL > [tʃ] did not wield any influence. Moreover we could give the same explanation also for the plural feminine ending form *-i*: it is attested in Shuadit and in other varieties of Provençal (e.g. Niçois, cf. Sauvaigo 1984; Papadopoulos et al. 2005), while surrounding Goyish Piedmontese dialects have *-e*. The correspondence with South-Eastern Piedmontese varieties with the phonetic evolution [e] > [i] might have reinforced the tendency coming from the original Provençal, and specifically Rhodanian/Marsillian, model.

The Southern Occitan nuances of Judeo-Provençal might help to explain the itinerary followed by Provençal Jews when expelled from French dominions: it is arguable that their route towards Piedmont counted many steps through the County of Nice – at that time the “crown's jewel” of Savoy House's dominion – and then through Western Ligurian territories, under Genoa's authority or under Savoy House's administration (especially Oneglia and some villages of the Nervia valley). As we have suggested above, it is highly probable that during this route throughout Western Liguria the *Ur*-JP had acquired some Ligurian features and reinforced the Provençal features that showed the same tendencies of Ligurian

varieties e.g. the pronoun [a'keʃtu] (see <šeaqeštu> ‘if this’) that exhibits a prosthetic [a] and a simple velar [k] < [kw] should come from the extreme Intemelian varieties of Western Ligurian, see Monegasque *achëstu* (Arveiller 1967, 233).¹²

6 Conclusions

In this paper we have described some relevant linguistic features of JP and the history and the possible origin of the Jewish communities in Piedmont: Jews expelled from France during the 14th and 15th centuries settled in Piedmont and might have early shifted from their own variety of Provençal to the local language. That should be the reason why JP appears so similar to Goyish Piedmontese varieties and shows Gallo-Italic patterns.

Our proposal relies mainly on the basis of (socio)linguistic data, and is in line with Jochnowitz (s.d.b), who maintains that the differences between JP and the other Jewish religiolects of Northern Italy could give grounds for postulating a derivation of Piedmontese Jewish community from the Judeo-Provençal one.¹³

Further studies are needed to deepen this highly fascinating topic, which is also strictly intertwined with the understanding of the socio-anthropological development of the “little homeland” that Piedmont has been for Jews for many centuries. In line with what Primo Levi (1986, 13) once said, the history of Piedmont would not have been the same if Jews had not been living here.

7 References

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¹² Monegasque has also constantly preverbal negation [nʌn] and some other interesting archaic features. For a definition of Intemelian, see Forner (1988, 462ss.).

¹³ Jochnowitz only offers “a bit of lexical evidence to link Shuadit with Judaeo-Piedmontese”. For instance, *Daber davar* is a set phrase in Shuadit, too (cf. §3.2.1.1).

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