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GESM 130 Assignment #1

Jewish children's literature, while simplistic in narrative and structure, can provide deep insight into various cultural and linguistic aspects of Judaism and serve as an effective introduction to Jewish languages. *Goodnight Bubbala, A Joyful Parody* by Sheryl Haft and *Buen Shabat, Shabbat Shalom* by Sarah Aroeste are two such examples that provide valuable perspectives on two Jewish languages: Yiddish and Ladino.

Goodnight Bubbala serves as a parody of the ever popular children's book *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown. As such, the narrative, characters, and setting are nearly identical. Adorned with a catchy rhyme scheme, the story depicts the somewhat hectic process of getting a young child to bed. However, in contrast with the original *Goodnight Moon*, *Goodnight Bubbala* features Yiddish loanwords throughout. Similarly to *Goodnight Moon*, there are no human characters present in the narrative—only rabbits, cats, and mice. Almost the entire story depicts the child's bedroom. Because of this incredibly contained narrative style, very little is known about the Jewish groups, locations, and time period represented. However, it is important to note that the author employs loanwords from Yiddish, the language of Ashkenazi Jews in Central and Eastern Europe (Yiddish). Because of this, it could be assumed that this family is composed of Ashkenazi Jews. Furthermore, the story depicts a large, multigenerational family with ages spanning from toddlers to elderly. The characters' collaboration to get the child to bed points to the overarching theme of the story, this being the cultivation of family in Jewish households. The family is seen engaging with Yiddish and Jewish culture intergenerationally and as a means to connect and bond. Thus, the implied moral lesson of *Goodnight Bubbala* may be the importance of fostering cultural community, especially within one's family. The pedagogical

goal of *Goodnight Bubbala* is to introduce the reader to Yiddish in a familiar narrative setting. The “Judaizing” of an already incredibly popular book points to the author’s post-vernacular attempt to expose readers to Yiddish within the confines of a plot that is comprehensible to a mass audience.

Buen Shabat, Shabbat Shalom offers perspective into a different Jewish language: Ladino. The story follows a Sephardic Jewish family as they celebrate a Shabbat dinner. Shabbat is a Jewish tradition that occurs every Friday evening and represents the Jewish Day of Rest (Shabbat). The author employs Ladino loanwords throughout, as represented in the title itself. Ladino is the Jewish language used by Sephardic Jews—those who lived in Spain prior to their expulsion in the late 15th century (Yiddish). While the location and time period are left ambiguous, the author explicitly introduces the book as a narrative following a Sephardic family. The family consists of a mother, father, and three young children, and the story takes place in their home—primarily the kitchen and dining table. While there is no conflict per se in the narrative, *Buen Shabat, Shabbat Shalom* shares a highly similar theme to *Goodnight Bubbala*, this being the celebration of Judaism in the family context. Throughout the story, there are many indications of both the children’s and parents’ enthusiasm surrounding Shabbat, and more broadly, Jewish culture. While the mother, father, and the oldest child prepare the table and food for Shabbat, the middle child is seen eagerly smiling and wearing a yamaka. It can be assumed that this is a weekly occurrence for the family, and nonetheless, the children and parents alike appear happy and grateful for the opportunity to celebrate their faith with their loved ones. Thus, the moral lesson of this story, once again, is the value of sharing Judaism with family members. The pedagogical goal of the author in *Buen Shabat, Shabbat Shalom* is also similar to *Goodnight Bubbala*, in that they aimed to introduce the reader to a Jewish language in a fairly simplistic

storyline. However, this book goes a step further by also introducing the Jewish ritual of Shabbat to unfamiliar readers.

These two stories represent similar expectations of knowledge for the readers. In *Goodnight Bubbala*, it is very evident that the author expected the reader to have little to no knowledge of Yiddish prior to reading. This is made clear through the glossary included at the end of the story which provides detailed definitions for all 29 Yiddish loanwords and phrases, including “Gey shlofn,” and “shmatta” (Haft 29). However, the author is less concerned with explaining certain cultural and ritualistic aspects of Judaism. An example of this is the visual and lexical references to the menorah. Though included in the glossary as the “candelabra lit on each night of Hanukkah,” the author does not attempt to explain the significance of this ritual in the context of Judaism (Haft 29). However, as the pedagogical goal was the introduction of Jewish *language*, and not necessarily Jewish *rituals*, this choice does not disrupt the overall flow and purpose of the book.

The author of *Buen Shabat, Shabbat Shalom* also assumes the reader has very little knowledge of Ladino. However, instead of providing a glossary, the author employs the technique of glossing. Glossing consists of the inclusion of an unfamiliar word or phrase and its translation directly after *within* the story itself. An example of this phenomenon in the story is, “Bless the family, la famiya. Enjoy the food, la komida” (Aroeste 7). This method of translation serves the overall purpose of introducing and teaching Ladino. Similar to *Goodnight Bubbala*, the author’s primary focus is not to explain and contextualize Jewish culture and rituals—here, Shabbat. Instead, knowledge of Shabbat is either assumed or of lesser importance to the overall narrative and pedagogical goal.

Although neither book contains metalinguistic comments within the narrative, *Goodnight Bubbala* does include a note from the author that brings life to the language on the pages: “Zesty and expressive, Yiddish phrases...often involve the hands, and even the heart and soul” (Haft 29). This metalinguistic comment allows the reader to properly envision the dialogue and the mannerisms of the characters throughout.

As previously mentioned, Yiddish is typically attributed to Ashkenazi Jews and Ladino to Sephardic Jews. However, because of the ambiguous settings and time periods of both *Goodnight Bubbala* and *Buen Shabat, Shabbat Shalom*, it is difficult to trace either book to a particular historical migration or language shift. Yet, this inability to pin the character origins of either book point to a unique phenomenon of these particular Jewish languages. Yiddish and Ladino are the only two Jewish languages to have survived diaspora (Yiddish). The diaspora refers to the migration of Jews out of their country of origin (Yiddish). This is relevant in the discussion of language maintenance because while other Jewish languages lost vitality once Jews moved away from their home countries, Ladino and Yiddish were able to establish roots outside of their countries of origin—Spain and Central Europe respectively. Because of this, it cannot be said with certainty that these families definitively have Jewish roots in Spain or Central Europe, as their use of Ladino and Yiddish may have been inherited by ancestors of a different country of origin that still employed those languages.

Both books' primary source of language contact is demonstrated in the form of loanwords. Loanwords, quite literally, are words and phrases that are “loaned” or borrowed from another language and inserted syntactically into the base language (Matras 111). Here, the base language is English. Being that the pedagogical goal of both of these books is to introduce a language, this fairly simplistic method of language exposure proves to be effective. By nature of

both of these books aiming to *teach* language, rather than use language conversationally, they are both undoubtedly post-vernacular engagements with Jewish language. *Goodnight Bubbala* utilizes loanwords like "schlepping" and "zeyde," incorporating them intrasententially (Haft 29). Likewise, *Buen Shabat, Shabbat Shalom* uses phrases like "las kandelas," meaning candles (Aroeste 3). The use of loanwords in both books is an example of ethnolinguistic infusion, the infusion of linguistic elements from one language into another (Benor). This method of language contact can be contrasted with translanguaging, which involves a more comprehensive and complex blending of languages and necessitates that the speaker is bilingual (Vogel and García 1).

The characters in each story do not have names. Thus, besides the use of loanwords, there is little to lexically analyze. Furthermore, the Jewish distinctions in other levels of linguistic analysis—phonology, morphology, syntax, and orthography—are far more subtle. *Buen Shabat, Shabbat Shalom* demonstrates a distinct aspect of Ladino morphology. Before any plural nouns, the article "the" is denoted as "las" (Aroeste 3). Also, the article "the" is dependent on whether the noun is feminine or masculine: nouns ending in "a" will use the article "la", and masculine nouns will use the article "el" (Aroeste 5). Although there are no distinct syntactic patterns in either book, *Goodnight Bubbala* offers an interesting phonological component. In the glossary, the author also includes a pronunciation for each Yiddish word introduced (Haft 29). For example, term "tchotchkes" is denoted as "CHOTCH-kuhs," the capital letters indicating the stress of the word (Haft 29). In terms of orthography, both books utilize the Latin alphabet, but an interesting phenomenon appears in *Goodnight Bubbala*. In one of the illustrations, the reader can see a book that reads "The Story of Hannukah" (Haft 12). Despite being written in Latin letters, the font appears to be mimicking the appearance of the Hebrew alphabet. This use of

“faux Hebrew” is a post-vernacular phenomenon that many use to exemplify a connection to Jewish culture or practice (Shandler 156).

Beyond the scope of linguistic analysis, both books share certain attributes of children’s literature as a whole. *Goodnight Bubbala* utilizes several aspects, including rhyming, repetition, and the use of animals. The word “Goodnight” is used on nearly every page which allows the primary point of plot progression to take place through the introduction of new objects. The exclusively animal characters make the story whimsical, zany, and engaging for younger readers. Although *Buen Shabat, Shabbat Shalom* appears to be less whimsical, there remain strong uses of rhyming and repetition throughout which aid in anchoring the narrative and making it easier to follow.

Despite featuring different Jewish languages, representing different groups of Jews, and even having different species of characters, *Buen Shabat, Shabbat Shalom* and *Goodnight Bubbala* share many similarities: they are both effective post-vernacular engagements with language directed at a younger audience, and importantly, they both emphasize the important role of Judaism in family settings. Both narratives achieve their pedagogical goal of exposure to Jewish culture and language while also spreading a universal moral theme of family.

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