ABSTRACT

Aromanian-armân, (Weigand, 1895) is an oral Eastern-Romance language spoken by the Aromanians (armâni, or armâneashti), an ethnic group historically known for transhumance, dispersed over a wide area of the Balkans in what is present-day Peninsular Greece, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Southern Romania, Serbia, and Albania. These people have been noted as Aromanians or Vlachs sometime since the eighth century AD. (Caranica, 1990). Their ethnicity (Eriksen, 2010) is controversial with Greeks believing them Latinised Greeks, Romanians considering them Romanian, others as Balkan natives from Wallachia (Ruzica, 2006).

In Greek, the current word for Aromanian is in fact ‘Vlach’ believed to originate from the Latin terms Volcae, Volci (Volks, Wolks) referring to a Celtic tribe from Gaul that had learnt Latin and become Latinized. The Volks-Wolks were the closest neighbors to Germanic tribes in the area, which resulted in Germans referring to all Latin speakers as ‘Volks,’ the same way they did with their language.

For clarification, in this study: Aromanian, Vlach (-) Aromanian and Vlach will all be used to refer to this ethnic group and language.

The word Volci was adopted by Germanic speakers and took different forms over time: Walachen, Welchland, Wallis, Wallons, Wales, Welsche etc. These terms are still visible in different European languages today and refer to ‘Latin speaker.’ The Slavic speakers borrowed the word from the Germans as: Olahy, Olahi, Valachi, Voloh, Vloh whereas the Byzantines borrowed it as ‘Vlachs’ (Tapanikos, 2020).

Their isolated modus vivendi, between pastoral valleys and high mountains, confined them to hardship and socio-cultural periphery, and allowed relative immunity from major European conflicts and periods of unrest spanning short of a millennium.

From 1975 when the modern Greek Republic is finally consolidated, the ideology of ‘one people, one language’ is an intrinsic part of Greek nationality and nationalism (Moschonas, 2004).

Lacking written, standardized forms, Aromanian has been transmitted orally from generation to generation in the Epirus, Macedonia and Thessally regions of Greece.

With profound socio-economic changes and rewards, Aromanians left their pastoral lifestyle in large numbers (Beis, 2000) attracted by prospects of a better future in Greek urban centers and Western European countries, USA, or Australia. In modern times, with Greek being the only language of instruction and communication in the wider society (Chomsky, 1971), the generational language-transfer cycle has been broken, and Aromanian is now endangered (Dinas et al., 2011). On the other hand, Aromanian folklore and traditional festivals are very much alive through associations like the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Cultural Associations of Vlachs, while many self-identified Aromanians do not speak a word of their ancestral language, by choice (Kahl, 2004).

How did this (apparent) contradiction come to be?

What drove Aromanians away from their language and led to the assimilation into Greek society, language, and culture so completely that it will lead to the death of Aromanian in Greece?

Keywords: eastern romance, European minority languages, language policy, onolingualism and multilingualism in Greece.
I. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to understand the main underlying factors leading to the language shift from Aromanian into Greek, and why Aromanian speaker numbers have dramatically declined between the Greek Republic’s formation in 1975 and the present day. This must be put in context with the thousand-years long ethno-historical, socio-linguistic, and political factors leading up to the status of Aromanian as an endangered language. Secondly to document written and audio testimonies from some of the last surviving native-speakers of Aromanian and the younger generations in the Metsovo area, considered the main center of the Vlach-Aromanians today. Aromanian is an Eastern-Romance language formed around the 8th century AD, and closely related to the other neo-Latin languages of Europe (see in Table I):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Aromanian</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
<th>Romanian</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I praise (verb)</td>
<td>alavdu</td>
<td>Je loue</td>
<td>lodo</td>
<td>louvo</td>
<td>laud</td>
<td>yo alabo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beard</td>
<td>barbã</td>
<td>barbe</td>
<td>barba</td>
<td>barba</td>
<td>barba</td>
<td>barba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dog</td>
<td>câine</td>
<td>chien</td>
<td>cane</td>
<td>căo</td>
<td>câine</td>
<td>perro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open (i.e., door)</td>
<td>disfaptã</td>
<td>ouverte</td>
<td>aperta</td>
<td>aberta</td>
<td>deschisã</td>
<td>abierta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I (pronoun)</td>
<td>eu</td>
<td>moi, je</td>
<td>io</td>
<td>eu</td>
<td>eu</td>
<td>yo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sons</td>
<td>ficiorjî</td>
<td>fils</td>
<td>figli</td>
<td>filhos</td>
<td>fii</td>
<td>hijos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big, large</td>
<td>gros, grand</td>
<td>grande, largo</td>
<td>mare</td>
<td>grande, largo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you (~Greek γιαρωτιο)</td>
<td>merci</td>
<td>grazie</td>
<td>obrigado</td>
<td>mulţumesc</td>
<td>gracias</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. RESEARCH METHODS

A mixed qualitative and quantitative approach was used in collecting data from participants. This proved difficult due to the small number of speakers in existence and a general reluctance from the Aromanian community and representative institutions to participate in this kind of study particularly with strangers (see in Fig. 1).

Field data collection and observation were used for purposes of documentation, capturing the live language spoken by native speakers. Some elderly and mature still active L1 users of Aromanian, agreed to record different sentences (McKinley & Rose, 2020) which produced limited, but qualifiable outcomes (Fig. 2).

Participants were intergenerational, aged between six and 90 years, male and female, belonged to four different families either by bloodline, marriage, or both. All (self-) identified as ethnic Aromanian Vlachs. Among elderly participants, some had only completed primary school. All participants were completely literate, and the younger generations often attend higher education:
III. RESULTS

Although small and with limitations, the study showed a trend on language maintenance and likely future outcomes.

The data collected from Metsovo Aromanians showed a clear trend as exposed below. A Quantitative correlational and quasi-experimental survey was designed in a questionnaire format with a total of twenty-four participants (Grant et al., 2017) both in English and Greek.

There was a correlation between age and language proficiency with people aged over seventy years speaking Aromanian as L1 (native) and in some cases identifying as bilingual, decreasing to L2 or ‘fragmented knowledge’, meaning that they could understand and speak some words or short sentences in people older than forty-one years (see Fig. 3):

All participants believed in varying degrees of conviction that Aromanian would not be important with eleven believing that Greek will completely replace Aromanian, followed by those who affirmed Greek and English as important languages for communication. All participants aged fifty-five or under spoke English as L2, at varying levels of fluency.

From the L1 Aromanian speakers, all participants agreed to record several sentences in Aromanian either from reading the Greek or English versions, or in the case of elderly participants they had one of their family members read the Greek sentences out to them. The MP3 file below contains three different recordings of native speakers aged between 49 and 90 years:

*Aromanian speakersx3-90 to 49 yo mp3

For reader clarity, all recorded sentences have subsequently been written in the Latin alphabet and transcribed according to the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) guidelines:

The mountains are beautiful! Τα βουνά είναι όμορφα!
Παρακαλώ γράψτε αυτήν την πρόταση στα αρμανικά (ό,τι καλύτερο μπορείτε/αν μπορείτε):
MuntsiÍi sunu m(u)şati
/mül.si.ˈi.i su.ˈnu m(ˈu)ʃɐ.ˈti/

The mountains were most beautiful in Winter. Τα βουνά ήταν πιο όμορφα τον χειμώνα.

Παρακαλώ γράψτε αυτήν την πρόταση στα αρμανικά (ό,τι καλύτερο μπορείτε/αν μπορείτε):
MuntsiÍi iara mai m(u)şati iîarna.
/mül.si.ˈi.i a.ˈrn ˈmaj m(ˈu)ʃɐ.ˈti ˈi.ˈa.ɾɐ/

I went to England once. And you? Πήγα μια φορά στην Αγγλία. Και εσύ?

Παρακαλώ γράψτε αυτήν την πρόταση στα αρμανικά (ό,τι καλύτερο μπορείτε/αν μπορείτε):
Mi duşu ună oară tu Anglie, şi tine?
/ˈmi ˈduʃ ˈu ˈună o.ˈa.ɾă ˈtu ɐ̃.ˈgɨ.i.ʃi ˈti.nɨ?/

I will go shopping on Tuesday afternoon. Θα πάω για ψώνια την Τρίτη το απόγευμα.

Παρακαλώ γράψτε αυτήν την πρόταση στα αρμανικά (ό,τι καλύτερο μπορείτε/αν μπορείτε):
Vas mi ducu tră acumpîrare, Martși după prîndzu/soara
/ˈvaʃ ˈmi ˈdu.ˈku tɾă ə.ˈkũp.ˈʁə.ɾɨ, maˈɾt.ˈʃi ˈdupă pri.ˈndzu.ˈso.ˈə.ɾə/
The Aromanian native speakers who left for urban centers and their immediate descendants, maintaining close family links, intermarriage which was favored amongst Vlachs for many centuries, contact with their birthplace, closely-knit businesses, and communities even away from their ancestral homelands, may have at most, delayed the disjuncture and language-shift. Furthermore, language prestige and linguistic discrimination are inherently social phenomena (Yadla, 2016): Aromanians born and raised in majority Greek settings, would become aware of their (perceived) difference from relatively early in their lives. People from minorities or minority-communities who are targets of discriminatory behavior, will often seek to overcome social boundaries out of self-preservation and dignity, by behaving no differently to the majority surrounding them (Goeb et al., 1996).

The accession of Greece to the then EEC, now EU in 1981 has brought many economic benefits, development at all levels, and inclusion in a much larger and powerful European family.

It was also a turning point in the consolidation of this nation which is simultaneously ancient and young: Greece became part of a much more stable and protective bloc of nations, this allowed for Greeks to assert themselves and focus on their identity, culture, language.

Greece has had to face and overcome multiple economic and political crises over the past forty years, witnessed the fall and rise of nations right across her borders while collective memories of subjugation, invasions and struggles for freedom linger on.

From that viewpoint, it makes sense that minority languages and ethnic minorities are perceived as potential threats to the unity and harmony of Greece even in 2022. Internal particularities and EU decrees do not always make an ideal combination. Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union concerning cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity, stipulates that ‘the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity’ (FRA) and is clear regarding Non-discrimination within the European Union.

Greece ratified the European Social Charter on 06/06/1984 and the Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter on 18/06/1998. It ratified the Revised Social Charter on 18 March 2016, accepting ninety-six of the ninety-eight paragraphs. The practical implementation of these, in terms of governance, judicial, institutional, sociocultural ways in Greece has been the object of scrutiny and criticism (COE, 2012).

Specifically, when it comes to the matter of minority languages and the ECMRL (European Charter for Minority or Regional Languages, COE) recommendations, Greece refuted this charter’s envisioned plans and policies from the start and was one of the countries which had not signed or ratified ECMRL Treaty 148 as of 25/07/2022.

This illustrates how averse the Greek state is to any change in direction which could potentially lead to ethnic and sociocultural tensions and destabilize the country’s unity. Public opinion appears to either support or implicitly accept these political decisions.

The Aromanian official representatives, seemingly emulating their community’s sentiment, are quite satisfied with the contemporary Greece status quo. This attitude was also manifest in Metsovo and in the data collected: Aromanian is no longer fundamental to day-to-day interactions inside the Aromanian community.

The decline of Aromanian in Greece was partly caused by prohibitive language policies, educational policies (or non-existence thereof), and family language-transmission conditions (Lane & Wigglesworth, 2021). Like with numerous other languages in Europe and beyond, there was a combination of major factors external and internal particularly in the twentieth century, which caused irreversible sociocultural changes.

The pace of change has become even faster and more dramatic with the new Millenium, the Internet and globalization. Aromanian is likely to expire with the last native speakers in the sense that ‘a language dies when nobody speaks it anymore’ (Crystal, 2002, p. 1) for every-day communication.

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