Standard Languages and Language Standards: Greek, Past and Present

Edited by
Alexandra Georgakopoulou and Michael Silk

In 1821, when the banner of revolution was raised against the empire of the Ottoman Turks, the story of 'Modern Greece' is usually said to begin. Less well known is the international recognition given to Greece as an independent state with full sovereign rights, as early as 1830, placing Greece in the vanguard among the new nation-states of Europe. This book brings together scholars from different disciplines to explore the contribution of characteristic 19th-century European modes of thought to the 'making' of Greece as a modern nation, focusing on the themes of nationalism, romanticism, and the uses of the Classical and Byzantine past in the construction of a durable national identity at once 'Greek' and 'modern'.
Greek With No Models, History or Standard: Muslim Pontic Greek

Pietro Bortone

In memory of Tassos Christidis

Background
In north-eastern Turkey, in the area known to the Greeks as Північна, there used to be a large, high-profile Greek community, which was forcibly expelled en masse in 1923 in the infamous 'Exchange of Populations' between Greece and Turkey. It is less well known that there are still a few rather isolated villages in the eastern corner, in the Trabzon area, especially near Of, where the locals speak varieties of a 'dialect' that is in fact Greek – akin to the Pontic Greek dialects once spoken there by Greeks. The speakers, of essentially Turkish and Muslim identity, descend in part from Greeks who converted to Islam over 300 years ago, developed a separate identity, came to be regarded as Turks, and were thus able to remain in the area to this day.

Standard Greek amongst Pontian Greeks
Until 1976, the linguistic situation of Greece was the textbook example of diglossia, with demotic (vernacular 'Modern' Greek) as the spoken variety, and katharevousa (archaizing, puristic Greek) as the normal non-literary written medium. When Pontian Greeks arrived in Greece in 1923, they found themselves in a country where their dialect had low status, where linguistic uniformity was seen as essential for political unity, where refugees coming from Turkey faced prejudice, and where

I wish to thank Peter Mackridge for encouraging me to work in this area, as well as for comments on an earlier draft of this article. I also gratefully acknowledge the support given to me for my research, through scholarships and fellowships, by the Wingate Foundation, The Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, The Program in Hellenic Studies of Princeton University and The Institute for the Humanities of the University of Illinois at Chicago.

With the exception of Ioannis Parharidis in the 1870s, Peter Mackridge was the first scholar to research this dialect (see p. 88 below, under References).

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the wider community used the variety of Greek that even in Pontus was regarded as the proper form. The most prominent Pontian scholars soon declared that their dialect was doomed.2

The Pontic dialect, nevertheless, still survives in some of the areas of Greece to which it has been transplanted—spoken, according to some estimates, by as many as 300,000 people.3 Standard Greek, naturally, has exerted a discernible influence on it—but this had already been happening even when the speakers were still in Turkey: Greek-identified (that is, Christian Orthodox) Pontians always maintained very strong cultural ties with Greece, and even had Greek schools, usually under the control of the Church, from kindergarten to secondary level. The schools were a focal point for the community, who led an independent life from the surrounding Muslims and often lived in separate villages.

Greek schools in Pontus taught Standard Greek prescriptively. In some, Standard Greek was even spoken, and the pupils' parents were also actively encouraged to use it at home. Curricula and syllabi were decided in Greece, and the books and school manuals came from Greece. School books had an explicit nationalistic outlook, and prominence was given to the classics, to Ancient Greek grammar, to religious texts and other books written in the archaic style favoured by the church. The teachers were often Orthodox clerics, many of whom had been trained in Greece. In the larger cities there were also Greek libraries, and Greek newspapers circulated. Thus the same literary models, linguistic values and language variety that were promoted in Greece were promoted among Greek-identified Pontians as well.

Pontian Greeks educated in the Greek schools of Pontus assumed that the very function of schools was to teach a language far removed from the vernacular; when they first moved to Greece, they 'trouvaient tout à fait bizarre, voire anormal, qu'une langue que les gens connaissaient déjà puisse être enseignée à l'école'.4 Their surprise is not unjustified: across the world, it is rare for children to go to school already knowing the language variety that the school wants them to know; even where the language used at school is not totally different from the one spoken by the pupils, the schools' aim is usually proficiency in the Schriftsprache.

No models, history or standard

Muslim Pontic Greek speakers, on the other hand, did not regard themselves as in any way Greek. They therefore had no contact with Greeks from Greece, and no exposure to the language of Greece. To this day they have never seen Modern Greek literature, have never heard Biblical Greek, have never studied classical Greek, have never learnt any Standard Greek (not even the Greek alphabet),

2 E.g. Papadopoulos (1953) 84 n. 1, and Lampidis (1959) 204.
4 "They found it completely bizarre, indeed abnormal, that a language that people knew already could be taught at school." Drettas (1998) 82.

have not heard Greek radio or TV, nor any form of the Greek language other than their own—and have not been touched by the strict Greek policies of language standardization, archatization and purism. In other words, their Greek has had no external models for centuries. Furthermore, it is not written, printed, or broadcast. So it has no recorded local tradition and therefore no internal models to refer back to either.

In Greece, Pontic studies has developed into a recognised field, with respected journals, known publishers, well-stocked archives and active research institutes. The pervasive diachronic slant and the heavy emphasis on history which is typical of traditional Greek scholarship has also been applied to Pontic studies. Greeks of Pontic origin have been writing extensively about the philological history of their dialect and about the historical background of their community, highlighting its classical past and its Greek connections. Muslim Pontic, conversely, has no history, especially for its speakers: not only do they have no written records, but many in their speech community do not even know that the language they speak has anything to do with Greek. Some do not know which parts of what they say are Turkish and which are their local 'other language'. Many call that language tâsiska or lasîksa, confusing it with Lazi, a quite different and unrelated language also spoken in northeastern Turkey. Many call it Romayka, but never Pontîzka (the standard term in Greece, of learned origin), and never Elinîksa either.

Romayka is not formally taught anywhere, and no norm for it has been established, maintained or promoted. Accordingly, it has no standard of any kind: its characteristics have not been planned or fixed, there is no official variety, no prescriptive rules, no concept of correctness, no anguish about purity. All this is, of course, amazing if we consider that Romayka is, after all, a variety of Greek—one of the languages with the longest and most vexed histories of prescriptivism, politicization, artificial intervention, linguistic self-consciousness, angst over correctness, and battles over choice of a standard that have even led to people being killed in the streets.5 Indeed, Romayka seems to provide the textbook example of a language in its natural state as dreamt of by sociolinguists and anthropologists:

To see language in its 'natural' state, one must find a variety which is neither a standard language, nor a dialect subordinate to a standard (since these too show pathological features, notably the difficulty of making judgements in terms of the non-standard dialect without being influenced by the standard one).

Greek standards

The Christian, Greek-identified Pontians, being Greek-educated, had firm opinions on linguistic correctness, purity and standards. Those who used to live in the Ora area occasionally heard the Greek dialect spoken in the nearby Muslim villages and, given their Greek background, had clear views about that too—although they

5 The epeXyloûa riot in Athens (8 November 1901) following the serialization, in the newspaper Aëgina, of A. Polits' translation of Matthew's Gospel into demotic.
6 Hudson (1996) 34, one of the main textbooks in sociolinguistics.
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were the only local Greek-speakers who judged the ‘Muslim’ dialect according to a standard. Researching historical archives in Athens, in several handwritten interviews with 1923 Pontian Greek refugees, I found that many reported with bemusement that there were τομοχώκα χωρά που μαλάκαι ελληνικά καλύτερα από μας – ‘Turkish villages that spoke Greek better than we did’.8

In recent years, a few Greeks of Pontian origin have travelled to eastern Turkey on holiday, where they heard Muslim Pontic Greek. They regarded it simply as another variety of Pontic, and they told me that the western varieties of the Muslim dialects, which are the ones that most closely resemble ‘Christian’ Pontic, are ‘αυτά που καθηκόνταν πολύ’, the purest Pontic. This shows that they classify varieties of Pontic as good or bad with implicit reference to an ideal norm – even if that remains vague, unofficial and probably variable9 – and they do so by taking the Pontic spoken in Greece (the variety spoken by the overwhelming majority of Pontic speakers) as their automatic standard. When they assess the Pontic dialects of Greece, on the other hand, they often label as ‘purest Pontic’ the varieties least influenced by Standard Greek,10 treating the degree of difference from the national language as an index of dialectal ‘purity’.

Indeed, now that Greek Pontic has been relocated to Greece, and is used in parallel with Standard Greek,11 its speakers have come to feel that it needs a standard form of its own. A fairly standardized orthography, after lengthy discussions in specialized journals, has been developed: it uses the Greek alphabet as a matter of course (with diacritics for the sounds that Greek lacks), and restores historical spelling – for instance, with diphthongs where pronunciation has monophthongized. Small details, such as the use of apostrophes to mark vowels ‘missing’ in comparison with the national language (e.g. εγγοίνια), show how Standard Greek is treated as a yardstick. A supra-regional variety of Pontic (incorporating elements of Standard Greek) has been emerging,12 and Greek linguists refer to it as κοινή νεοποντική, ‘Common Modern Pontic’. As the name indicates, it is conceptualized in the same terms as the standard form of Greek (κοινή νεοελληνική, ‘Common Modern Greek’), and this is probably because it is the most common written form of Greek Pontic – even if no form of Pontic is officially standard.13 But the perception that there must be a consensus variety is not only felt when writing: actors in the Pontic theatre, even if not always fluent in Pontic, strive to maintain a ‘correct’ pronunciation.14

8 Archives of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies, Athens: interview catalogue as PO129, 29. I consider what they meant by ‘better’ below, pp. 82-3.
10 Mackridge (personal communication).
14 Drettas (1998) 84.

The ‘language-or-dialect’ issue

The wish to emphasize both the distinctiveness of Pontic and its Greek lineage has been fuelling an intense debate about whether Pontic should be classified as a dialect or a language. The former view is favoured by Greek scholars, while foreign (or foreign-based) scholars often support the latter view. Thus, for Andriots and Kondosopoulos, Pontic is a dialect,15 while Tombaidis adds bluntly:

γιὰ όσους έχον είπε και στοιχεία για την ιστορία της γλώσσας μας δεν υπάρχουν τέμα... Οπωσδήποτε, δεν μπορούμε να θεωρήσουμε γλώσσα την ποντικική.

For those who have even just an elementary knowledge of the history of our language there is no question... We cannot possibly regard Pontic as a language.16

On the other hand, Dawkins wrote that Pontic is ‘almost’ a language, while Shirokof described Pontic, Tskonian and the varieties of Greek spoken in the Ukraine, Italy and Corsica as ‘self-standing languages’ (самостоятельные языки). This view is echoed by Drettas, who talks of ‘language pontique’ and of ‘languages néo-grecques’.17

Linguists have been pointing out for a long time that there is no scientific distinction between dialect and language18 – but the distinction is still commonly made. In Greek, a further complication is the currency of a third term, ιδίωμα, that indicates a variety only slightly diverging from the norm – and this may be another reason why Greeks may designates the term ‘dialect’ (διαλέκτος) some less intelligible varieties that in English we might label ‘languages’. One often comes across articles that argue, with appeals to various criteria, for or against the classification of a speech variety as a language or as a dialect. Pontic is only one example. The criteria most commonly invoked are:

(a) quantitative: number of speakers;
(b) political: legal and social status;
(c) functional: suitability for multiple uses, especially depending on whether a written form exists;
(d) communicative: intelligibility, also related to structural dissimilarity to a related standard language.

All these criteria are open to debate – clearly so if applied to Pontic:

(a) The fact that Pontic has relatively few speakers does not prove that it is a dialect, as there are many languages with only a handful of speakers.
(b) It is true that linguistic varieties classified as ‘dialects’ often have no official status and low social status – but few of the people keen to emphasize that Pontic is a dialect of Greek would cite as evidence the fact that Pontic lacks legal
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recognition and has lower prestige than Standard Greek. The term 'dialect' (like the term 'accent') commonly has belittling undertones, and often suggests that the speech variety in question is sub-standard, whereas the label of 'language' has connotations of correctness and authority. But status cannot be the deciding factor anyway, both because dialects can be (and often have been) raised to the rank of languages – the essence of the process of language extension (Asiatic) – and because many languages (like Romany in Greece), whose status is indeed poor socially and non-existent legally, would never be classified as dialects given their linguistic distance (Aeolian) from the national language.

(c) It is also true that, in popular parlance, the term 'dialects' normally describes the speech varieties for which no written form has been developed, either at all or for literature.19 However, forms of Greek that are recognised as dialects, like Cretan, have been written and have included influential and widely read literary texts – and Cretan could easily have become the basis of the modern national standard. Similarly, what we refer to as the 'dialects' of Ancient Greek are known to us through their rich and largely literary written tradition. Indeed, the more general idea that there is (or should be) one normative, unifying, standard language – an assumption that has had vast linguistic, cultural, social and political consequences in modern Greece – is alien to ancient Greece. In the classical period, no single standard was recognised, probably because there was no single Greek state; and different varieties of Greek had similar status.

Moreover, if 'dialect' means 'unwritten language', Muslim Pontic would have to be called a dialect, but Christian Pontic could not, because it has been extensively written. The writing of Christian Pontic occurred mainly after 1923, when the Christian Pontians resettled in Greece. In other countries where Greek-identified speakers of Pontic live, varieties of Pontic have also had a written form. In Russia, where Greeks, for a time, were recognised as an ethnicity and had their own schools and press, Pontic and non-standard varieties of Greek started being written and printed in the late 1920s. This entailed all the usual events associated with the writing of 'languages': there were spelling reforms and lengthy debates about which form of Greek should be selected as the standard – Pontic being one contender. A general conference held in Moscow in 1926, during a period when Soviet authorities encouraged minority language schools and publications, ruled that the Greeks of Russia would no longer use katharevousa but rather demotic Greek with a 'phonetic' spelling that abandoned historical orthography and the traditional system of multiple accents and breathings. The Greeks of Greece were horrified. The main Greek publishing house of the USSR, ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΗ [sic] (Communist), which had a very popular newspaper of the same name, even published a Pontic grammar. The newspaper was initially in simple katharevousa but then switched to Pontic, developing it with Russian loanwords and words close to demotic Greek. For years after the 1926 conference, it advocated Pontic as official language of the

community and of its schools.21 An editorial in 1928 revealed that the journalists had felt forced to switch to Pontic to be comprehensible to their target readership; their main worry in terms of linguistic models was that an archaic dialect like Pontic would sound like ecclesiastical Greek22 – a very unfortunate situation for a communist paper that was even printed in red ink.

(d) Structural similarity and partial intelligibility with Standard Greek are often cited as reasons for classifying Pontic as a dialect. But these too are inconclusive criteria, since Pontic differs more from Standard Greek than Norwegian does from Danish, Serbian from Croatian, or Romanian from Moldavian. Conversely, the so-called Chinese 'dialects' are mutually unintelligible, but are traditionally seen as part of a single language because they share a written form. Greek has no close relatives amongst official languages, and this may have reinforced the Greeks' perception that large linguistic differences (Aeolian) are needed for 'language' status.23 The problem with Aeolian and intelligibility as criteria is that they are matters of degree, and their assessment is therefore subjective. Pontic has been said to be a dialect by virtue of claims that it has basically the same phonemic inventory, morphological system and syntax as Standard Greek, and that the lexical influence of Turkish did not alter the physiognomy of Pontic because the inflections remained Greek.24 All this is questionable.

It is, therefore, not only the choice of criteria but also the interpretation of the criteria that remains arbitrary. Opinions are affected by extra-linguistic factors too: many Greeks object to classifying Pontic as a language because they feel that this suggests that Pontic is not Greek, and that it therefore raises emotional issues about the identity of the speakers and of the land they left behind. In Turkish, Romanya is indeed referred to by a term (Romanc) unrelated to the one used for the Greek of Greece (Yunanca), but this distinction is not unlike the one made in Greek – with good reason – between ΑΛΒΑΝΩΤΑ (Albanian) and ΠΟΠΟΔΙΟΤΙΚΟ (a related dialect spoken in Greece) or between ΡΟΥΜΑΝΟΣ (Romanian) and ΒΟΥΛΓΑΡΩΤΑ (a related dialect spoken in Greece).

Turkish standards

Although there is no standard form of Greek recognised in Pontus today, it would be very misleading to say that there is no linguistic norm that is recognised and promoted amongst Muslim Pontic speakers. There is one, and that is Turkish. Turkish, of course, is unrelated to Greek – it is a language of the Turkic branch of the Altaic family, related to Uzbek, Tatar, Kazakh, Uighur, Kyrgyz, Azerbaijani and Turkmen. Turkish scholarship often classifies all these languages as dialects of Turkish;25 but even if we disregard these, and count only the speakers of Turkey's

20 Dawkins (1937) 40.
22 Karppis (1996/7) 31.
recognition and has lower prestige than Standard Greek. The term ‘dialect’ (like the term ‘accent’) commonly has belittling undertones, and often suggests that the speech variety in question is sub-standard, whereas the label of ‘language’ has connotations of correctness and authority. But status cannot be the deciding factor anyway, both because dialects can be (and often have been) raised to the rank of languages — the essence of the process of language extension (Asabis) — and because many languages (like Romany in Greece), whose status is indeed poor socially and non-existent legally, would never be classified as dialects given their linguistic distance (Asistant) from the national language.

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Turkish (Türkçe Türkçesi), Turkish speakers number nearly seventy million. The alphabet they use, which is an expanded form of the Latin alphabet, is the only one known to Romayka speakers.

Turkish is officially a ‘language’; as such, it has – like Greek – received many artificial interventions designed to standardize it, expand it and above all ‘purify’ it from the foreign elements it has adopted. The Turkish language reform – which took off in the 1930s and is, to a degree, still operative – went to extreme lengths, and is rightly known in Turkish history as nothing less than the dil deverimi ‘language revolution’. Although it is very common for languages with official status and a written tradition to undergo artificial interventions (especially if they belong to a country struggling to assert a separate or new national identity), few languages have experienced such radical and ongoing tampering as Turkish and Greek. However, Turkish prescriptivism, unlike its Greek counterpart, promoted the adoption of new forms, and only rarely the revival of old ones.

In Pontus, Turkish is the language for all official purposes. Even place names have been Turkicized. In 1964, by orders of the Ministry of the Interior, the foreign (or seemingly foreign) names of the localities in the region were modified or changed entirely. Thus, for instance, Αλεξάνδρεια became Usunartça, Συκέτσα became Usungöl, Κατσουρί became Çaykara, Ζηνόπολ became Bolûmû. Many locals, nonetheless, still use the old Greek and Laz names of villages, and at times are not sure about the new ones.

As a result of the status of Turkish as their only standard, speakers of Romayka – although not sure about what ‘correct’ Romayka could be – have very clear views as to what is and is not correct Turkish. They also feel that the Turkish dialect of their area, which is also spoken by very many monolingual Turks, is not proper Turkish. Interestingly, scholars have ascribed the differences between Black Sea Turkish and the standard language, such as the striking violation of vowel harmony (the fundamental and all-pervasive principle of Turkish phonology), to the substrate influence of Greek.23

Turkish is taught in all schools in Pontus, and is the only language that is taught. This has profound effects, since education in Turkey is free and, in principle, mandatory for both sexes until the age of fourteen. Despite the fact that to this day many Muslim Pontians report that they did not know Turkish until they went to school (indicating that their Turkish was learnt rather than acquired: late bilingualism in its technical sense),24 Turkish is also the only medium of school instruction.

This attitude on the part of the schools is not peculiar to Turkey: in most, if not all, countries, and long before the development of modern media, schools have been an instrument of the state in the promotion of the official line on language use.

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29 Arguments and counterarguments are outlined in Appel and Muyssen (1987) 61–3.
30 Several studies supporting this are cited in Landry and Allard (1992) 223.
34 In the sense of Lambert (1974).
now become common, albeit belatedly, even in Romayka-speaking villages. Turkish is also used locally by Romayka speakers as a *lingua franca* to interact with other Turks, some of whom use other unwritten languages at home: besides Romayka, there are other languages spoken in the area – notably Laz – which are not normally written or broadcast, and are, like Romayka, disregarded in schools. Romayka fares poorly on most key indicators normally cited as crucial for linguistic survival: it is demographically weak, and its speakers are culturally, religiously and visually similar to the wider community; the wider community, on the other hand, is culturally, politically, economically and demographically stronger, and allows assimilation.

The language shift away from Pontic is not peculiar to its Turkish setting. In Greece too, Pontic, like all other Greek dialects, is facing terminal attrition, and is being replaced by Standard Greek. The same is happening in other countries with a sizeable Pontic-speaking population, along the other (northern and eastern) shores of the Black Sea. In Russia and the Ukraine, Pontic is threatened not only by Russian and Ukrainian, but by Standard Modern Greek, which is promoted there by Greece, and has been introduced as a foreign language at local schools. Something similar takes place in other countries where Greek dialects are spoken: in Apulia, southern Italy, the local Greek is officially recognised and partly taught, but has to compete not only with Italian but with Standard Modern Greek, which is also taught in local schools.

**Expected effects of not having a Greek standard**

A unified standard encourages, in principle, both continuity and homogeneity. It promotes diachronic and synchronic uniformity. It is normally assumed that the existence of a standard greatly favours the maintenance and survival of a language. Conversely, the existence of a written and standardized form of the *riciol* majority language is considered a typical factor contributing to language shift. Many linguistic communities have created an artificial mixed variety of their language to be used as a common form, in the belief that this will make it more durable. The standardization of other varieties of Greek spoken outside Greece, such as the Grico of Apulia, in southern Italy, has been advocated by scholars who claim that this is a priority if the speech community wants to save its language. The same thing is happening with other Balkan languages; there is a campaign, for example, for the standardization of Arbresh, the form of Albanian spoken in Sicily, in the belief that this will halt its demise. Indeed, other endangered languages have been standardized in the express hope of saving them: a case in point is the creation in Switzerland of *Romansch Grischun* in 1982, as a ‘compromise language’ to unify and preserve Romansh.

To assess whether this could be done with Romayka, we need to consider what the establishment of a particular language form as the standard commonly entails:

(a) Selection: identification of a favoured variety (‘status planning’).
(b) Codification: graphization and grammatical definition (‘corpus planning’).
(c) Elaboration: development of vocabulary and stylistic variants.
(d) Endorsement: development and implementation by the state (political support).
(e) Endorsement and implementation by the community (public support).

None of these factors exist for Romayka:

(a) Romayka has many equal varieties, differing significantly in vocabulary, morphology and syntax. Lack of uniformity is a weakening factor for a language. A standard, conversely, is more than an aid to interdialectal communication: it is a partial protection from linguistic (and, according to some, social and political) fragmentation. In Greece, this used to be pointed out with reference to spoken Greek by those who supported *katharevousa* as the only unified and unifying language of a nation that they perceived as being under threat.

(b) Except for the occasional word quoted in a text in another language, a couple of internet sites, and sporadic and unsystematic use in private messages, Romayka is not written at all. Therefore, it also lacks the most common material required for the emergence of a standard: a written tradition, with an agreed canon of ‘best’ literature. Standardization is a practice essentially concerned with the written language: in Greece too, the perennial battle between *katharevousa* and *demosc* was about the selection of a written standard. Some hoped that *katharevousa* would also gradually become the spoken language of Greece, but even the advocates of *katharevousa* mostly used demotic when chatting. Their assumption, that an artificial, archaising, ‘purified’ form of written Greek could eventually replace the vernacular, only shows the power attributed to texts: the very fact that a language variety is written gives it an air of concreteness, permanence and authority. This explicit graphocentricism has long held sway, not only in public perceptions of language but also in the history of scholarship. The prestige of ‘dead’ languages like classical Greek and Latin, seen as the absolute prototypes of perfection, correctness and intellectual propriety, has reinforced the perception that linguistic models are fixed, that languages have diachronically a best phase and synchronically a *bon usage*, and that the written form is what matters and constitutes the ‘real’ language. Demotic Greek was often thought to have no grammar and, like many languages that had to coexist with a second, more prestigious language that had a long written history (like Yiddish with Hebrew, Catalan with Spanish), was not thought to be a language at all.

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(d) Romanyka has no legal recognition. However, over ninety-five per cent of the world's languages are not officially recognised in the states where they are spoken;44 furthermore, institutional accommodation and support, such as official status or school teaching, cannot compensate for the restricted use of an endangered language by its speakers or for its limited intergenerational transmission.45 Formal recognition of a language does not guarantee its survival, nor its status beyond the law books: in countries that officially recognise more than one language (Netherlands, Israel, Luxembourg, Singapore, Finland, India, Belgium, South Africa, Canada, to name but a few) each language has a different social standing. Legal provisions only give a weaker language a slightly better chance of survival, and only in some cases do they enable its speakers to remain monolingual. Indeed, many languages have official status in a country where they are nonetheless dying (for instance, Romansh in Switzerland, Irish in Ireland); this includes 'situationally' minority languages,46 which are very strong in another, even neighbouring, country (like Swedish, which is disappearing in Finland but thriving in Sweden). School teaching is, likewise, useful but not decisive. As has been wryly pointed out by Joshua Fishman,47 schools cannot ensure active knowledge of algebra a few years after graduation, unless there is a continuous interest and use afterwards; and the same surely applies to language maintenance.

(e) Romanyka speakers do not seek formal recognition of their language and do not endeavour to spread its use. In global terms, people actively fighting to save their language are usually very rare: a few activists guided by theoretical or sentimental reasons which the broader community endorses in principle but ignores in practice. Furthermore, Romanyka, unlike languages such as Hebrew and Irish, lacks political motivation: the speakers have no distinct ethnic and political identity, and no separatist aspirations, which are often key factors in the development and retention of a different language variety. Indeed, the few Romanyka speakers who might want to do something to save their language may be discouraged by the fear that their aims may be misconstrued as being political.

As the continuing demise of Irish and the unexpected success of 'Modern Hebrew' have shown, what really decides the fate of an endangered language is not institutional support but the speakers' own attitude. Becoming bilingual may be a necessity, but abandoning the use of the community's language in internal communication is, to some degree, a choice. Romanyka will probably disappear, ultimately, because its speakers will not bother to keep it going.

Across the globe, the prospects for endangered languages are not encouraging. It is estimated that, in the last five hundred years, half the world's languages have vanished,48 mainly with no trace, and that half of those left will become extinct in this century, with eighty per cent of the remainder being close to extinction.49 Although we mourn the demise of Greek in Asia Minor (probably because we see it happening), we ourselves easily forget that, in earlier times, the spread of Greek in Asia Minor (like that of Turkish later) obliterated several pre-existing languages too.

Greek and purism

Borrowing foreign words is the first and most common structural change resulting from language contact, and is popularly identified as the beginning of the slippery slope towards language death. The scholarly contribution to the establishment and maintenance of a standard has often involved purging foreign words (or, less often, phrases and syntactic constructions)50 by studiously producing new 'native' terms. It is worth noting that even scholars who decry a prescriptive approach to languages nevertheless often favour measures to prevent one language from being gradually replaced by another.

The artificial creation of new words from native roots is very common and often successful. A language-engineering programme of this kind has been effected on a vast scale in Israeli Modern Hebrew, and the substitution of borrowed elements by native ones, often designed ad hoc, has been carried out in many languages, such as Swedish, Hebrew, Tamil, Croatian, French, Icelandic, Welsh, German, and Lithuanian.

In Greek and in Turkish, foreign words have been strongly objected to, and have often been successfully expurgated and replaced. Puristic intervention in both languages was a response to political rather than linguistic issues, as shown by the fact that the words the Greek purists wanted to expunge because they were Turkish (a few random examples: σκοακα [back] street; κοννορι φίλω; χαίκινα 'animal, brute'; ντίκτε 'tribulation'; τζαμί 'glass'; λεκες 'stain') were

44 Haugen (1966) 931.
45 Appel and Muyssen (1987) 44.
49 Fishman (1992) 400.
50 Same (1992) 7.
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68 So called by Trudgill (2001) 25.
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Today, Standard Modern Greek, unlike Romayka, may have all the words it needs, but this is also because its lexicon is not only taken from demotic Greek: it has been considerably (and some may say artificially) enriched by katharevousa. Many missing words have been taken from the immense learned tradition (there is indeed some truth to the cliché that ‘the Greeks have a word for it’). For modern concepts, an ancient word has often been revived, given a novel semantic nuance and a new lease on life, e.g. υπάλληλος, ‘subordinate > employee’; υπουργός, ‘assistant > minister’; βουλή, ‘council > parliament’; κράτος, ‘sovereignty > state’. Other words have been made up from Ancient Greek roots, often in imitation of the western European originals, classic examples being French réaliser becoming πραγματοποιεῖ, German Weltanschauung becoming κοσμοθεωρία, and English skyscraper becoming ουρανοξύστης.53 This may seem contrived and cosmetic, but it is effective. The same thing has been done in Turkish, where countless new words and morphemes have been coined, often as replacements of foreign ones. This type of artificial lexical enrichment not only aims at expanding or modernizing a language’s vocabulary, but also at ‘protecting’ the language, at least superficially, from foreign elements. In Greece this is still successfully done: even if English is making inroads, numerous new Greek words are being created by calque, with morphemes almost invariably taken from Ancient or Medieval Greek. Opening a Greek web browser, one sees that a webpage is an ιστοσελίδα, the navigation toolbar is the έργαλειοθήκη πλοήγησης, the cache is the λανθάνουσα μνήμη, and the blocking of pop-up windows is the φραγμή άναδυόμενων παράθυρων. The puristic tradition of lexical coinage from native roots, typical of katharevousa, is alive and well.

Romayka and purism

The deliberate – and essentially learned – lexical engineering just discussed has not happened and cannot happen in Romayka. One reason is that ‘it is incontrovertible that puristic activity is usually associated with written, standard languages’.54 Then again, purism presupposes an awareness of the history of one’s language which is unavailable to Romayka speakers. It is also unlikely that they would turn to Standard Modern Greek as a source of borrowing – in the way Turkish has looked to other Turkic languages, Estonian to Finnish, and Romanian to other Romance languages – because Greek is the language associated with Greece and with Christianity. Lexical and phrasal enrichment does take place in Romayka, but the source normally is Turkish. In modern Greece, awareness of the history of Greek made it clear that Western European words like telephone and photograph

54 Thomas (1991) 2.
often the same words that Turkish purists wanted to expunge because they were not Turkish (sokak, kusur, hayvan are from Arabic, dort, cam, leke from Persian). Now the efforts of purists in both countries are focused, with little success, on loanwords from English.

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The puristic tradition of lexical coinage from native roots, typical of katharevousa, is alive and well.

Romayka and purism

The deliberate – and essentially learned – lexical engineering just discussed has not happened and cannot happen in Romayka. One reason is that 'it is uncontrollable that puristic activity is usually associated with written, standard languages'. Then again, purism presupposes an awareness of the history of one's language which is unavailable to Romayka speakers. It is also unlikely that they would turn to Standard Modern Greek as a source of borrowing – in the way Turkish has looked to other Turkic languages, Estonian to Finnish, and Romanian to other Romance languages – because Greek is the language associated with Greece and with Christianity. Lexical and phrasal enrichment does take place in Romayka, but the source normally is Turkish. In modern Greece, awareness of the history of Greek made it clear that Western European words like telephone and photograph had been coined with Ancient Greek roots; accordingly, they were re-Hellenized as τηλέφωνο and φωτογραφείο. In Romayka, the Turkish terms have been adopted, with minimal morphological and phonological adaptation: /telefon/, / fotoğraf/. In Romayka, borrowings from Turkish appear to have no limits: no restrictions are imposed socially or formally, and even the constraints normally expected in code-switching barely apply. The two languages are converging, as can be seen from the use of intra-sentential switching: not only are content morphemes (lexical items) of one language embedded into the morphosyntactic frame of the other, but syntactic configurations and morphological patterns taken from both languages are also blended together. It is becoming difficult to say that Turkish is not a native language (in itself a very elusive concept) of Romayka speakers.

Why is there no purism in Romayka? Why do speakers accept the dominance and the gradual take-over by Turkish? The reason is not only the standard status of Turkish. It is true that any standard language is 'the codified wishes of the socially dominant', and that the adoption of a foreign language by an entire community, either as first or second language, is also usually due to the political, social, economic or cultural clout (nationally or internationally) of its speakers. But this happens if that privileged position is recognised and accepted by the speakers of other dialects or other languages. A puristic attitude, on the other hand, is very often part of a national discourse. Theoricians of purism as a cross-linguistic phenomenon see it as part of a dualistic perception of the world. This might be an adequate description of the 'Greek/non-Greek' dichotomy in the world-view of ancient and, mutatis mutandis, modern Greeks, but it is not the way that Romayka speakers see other Turks. For Romayka speakers, Turkish is the language of their fellow-nationals; in Pontus, therefore, the crusades to 'de-Turkify' the language that were launched in Greece (as well as in other ex-Ottoman areas, such as Bulgaria) and neither feasible nor desired. Even the peoples who do fight against the foreign elements found in their language often do so selectively: Romanians endeavoured to expunge Slavic elements, but gladly adopted forms from French and Italian because that was the direction in which they wished to take their identity.

Another key factor is that, since their language has not been codified, systematized and given a model form, Romayka speakers have no notions of 'purity' vis-à-vis other languages – just as they have no notions of correctness to be used against ad hoc grammatical or syntactic constructions, and no notion that one local variety of Romayka is 'higher' than another. They seem free from the classic linguistic fears that beset speakers of standardized languages. The history of English also shows that anxiety about linguistic change and correctness peaked in

58. Cf. Oksirkki’s popular book, Let Us De-Turkify Our Language – An Essay for the Liberation of Greek from the Words that have Turkish Origin.
the eighteenth century, when spelling became more standardized. Standardization, after all, is essentially the suppression of optional variability (and so, in theory, of diachronic change),60 with some flexibility allowed only in speech. Romayka speakers have no standard (besides Turkish) and no worries: whenever I asked them how one decides which Romayka form is, in their view, right or better, they answered ‘serbest’, the Turkish for free/ly. This seems to contradict the general perception that:

All users of language in all speech communities apparently hold evaluative attitudes towards variant forms: some variants are regarded as ‘better’ or ‘more beautiful’ or ‘more appropriate’ or ‘more correct’ than others.61

Making up words, and even morphological and syntactic patterns, is a recognized possibility for speakers of languages without a standard, or at least without a standard known to the speakers.62 This does not mean that their language lacks structure: it does not have fewer linguistic rules – only fewer linguistic norms. Effective communication and competence (in the Chomskyian sense) certainly requires a shared language, but we all have an idiosyncratic and some room for creativity. And this is particularly acceptable in Romayka. For instance, I have heard the same (very fluent) Romayka speaker refer to the Greeks (of Greece) by four different but perfectly transparent terms:

(a) /elı́dhɔ/  
Greek ἔλληνξς, as in Ἐλλάδας, (στρατιώτης)ε(ς), (άνθρωπο)οι
(b) /elı́n̩/  
Greek ἔλληνς, as in Ἐλλήν(ες), (Ἀγγέλοι)
(c) /iːñ̩n̩/  
Turkish yunan ‘Greek’ + Greek ος
(d) /iːñ̩ñ̩/  
Turkish yunanı̂zme ‘Greek’ + Turkish -i or Greek -ή + Greek -ες,
as in Turkish Türkiye-i from Turkey, or Hellenized Turkish μεσοκ-Λή-δες.

Unexpected effects of not having a Greek standard

What does a variety of Greek look like, if it is unexposed to the Greek classicizing tradition and ἄρχειαλητέριος? The paradox is that, apart from the copious Turkish elements (to be expected, since the speakers are in Turkey), Muslim Pontic Greek has remained, in some respects, far more archaic than Modern Greek – even more archaic than ‘Christian’ Pontic. A big paradox indeed, if we consider the extensive and strenuous efforts made by the Greeks, for centuries, to make their Greek more archaic. This is why Greek-educated Pontians felt that Muslim Pontic was the ‘best Greek’. In unpublished interviews, several of the Christian refugees who moved from the Of area to Greece in the 1920s made relevant comments:

60 Milroy and Milroy (1985) 8.

63 (PO125) 24-5.
64 (PO129) 30, 33.
65 (PO133) 127.
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(a) /elidotf/  
Greek ἐλιάδος/τος, as in ἐλλιάδας, (περιττίς)τον (ες), (άνθρωπος)ς  
(b) /eleni/  
Greek ἐλένη, as in ἐλένης, (ευ)ρύχωρος  
(c) /u/  
Turkish عو /عو/  
(d) /yan/  
Turkish يون /يون/  
Turkish yunan ‘Greek’ + Greek ος.  

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Modern Greek /i/ where Greek spelling has an η: /ερθών/, /πενόν/, /εκτοσ/, /εφεπέα/ — representing Greek ηθών, ψήνων, ηκουσα, ηγάτηρα. Greek scholars are certain that this is the ancient pronunciation preserved; it is an extremely seductive thought, though doubts have been raised.

One remarkable feature, both philologically and sociolinguistically, is the pronunciation of third-person personal pronouns. Pontian refugees in Greece came to be derogatorily nicknamed σωπηγός to mock their pronunciation of the pronoun σώπος in Modern Greek it is pronounced /sópos/, but /autós/ in Pontic. The latter, however, is much closer to the classical pronunciation.

We may note that even the highly educated Greek archaizers never advocated that a more ancient pronunciation should be revived. Essentially, they ignored the profound changes in the phonetics of individual sounds from classical to contemporary Greek. Indeed, Modern Greeks pronounce even Ancient Greek as if it were Modern — just as, to a very large degree, they spell Modern Greek as if it were Ancient.

(b) Morphology

(i) The ancient imperative in -ίς/σφ survives: /ακουσ/, /αυσον/, /δεξιασιν/, /ανασίν/ — for Modern Greek ακούσε /ακούσε /ακούσε listen!, σύρε 'pull!', διαλέξε 'work!', ανά 'lit.', corresponding to ancient ακούσα, etc.

(ii) One also hears several old verbal forms such as /τεθαν/ 'was' — for Modern demotic Greek θάνα but older θασι — or /δικαίων/ 'came out' — for Modern βγάζε but Ancient εξέβγασε.

(iii) The vocalic temporal augment is still used: /εφέπεα/, /εκτοσ/ — for Modern demotic Greek αγάτηρα, ακούσα.

(iv) Some old possessives are still in use, like /εμον/ — for Modern Greek μον, but Ancient Greek ημόν.

(v) The ancient aorist passive has not merged with the perfect: /κοφεθε/, /κατέθε/, /πρέθε/ — unlike Modern Greek κροφθήσε 'she got scared', στάθεσα 'he stood', ζειθέντε 'it was cooked', but like Ancient Greek κεφθήνη, κατάθη, κυθήν. These ancient forms were highly recommended and valued by purists, but all Greek scholars admitted that one could not hope to hear them in spoken Greek, not even in the most educated conversations. Tsarzanos, for instance, writing in the katharevousa years, acknowledged that even a university professor conversing with another university professor would never say, for 'I slept', εκοφθησα (the classical form, which now would be pronounced /εκιμήθη/, corresponding to modern κομήθηκα). In Romayka, however, even an illiterate speaker says that (τ)ά /τικοτέθα/.

69 Horrocks (1997) 312–13
70 Tsarzanos (1954) 17.
71 Easternmost subdialects palatalize velar stops before front vowels: ερθέτε, in this case.

(c) Syntax

(i) Weak pronouns always follow the verb: /ερθίκασα to/ 'I understood it'. In Standard Greek this happens only after imperatives and gerunds.

(ii) Some varieties of Romayka also form the future tense like Medieval Greek, with πόλιν: /Ἀν πόλις/ 'I will eat' (Standard Greek διά φῶν). The particle διά, used also in Christian Pontic, is known only to some Romayka speakers.

(iii) As first noted by Mackridge, the infinitive, which has vanished from Modern Greek, from Christian Pontic, and from all dialects in Greece, is still used in some Romayka-speaking villages after the past tenses of /πέρα/ and /πές/, as in Medieval Greek. Romayka speakers say: /μπερασε τιμέθηνε/ 'I couldn't sleep', like Medieval Greek ουκ ἐμένετο κομίζειν, /μπεράσε εδέθη/ 'he did not want to come', like Ancient Greek οὐκ ἐδέησε ἐλειτούργειν, blurring εδέϊν and ἐμένα.

(d) Semantics

(i) /τερ/ still means 'to look', as it did in Ancient Greek, unlike Modern Greek τιμέω, which means (mainly) 'to keep'.

(ii) /ενώρ/ still means 'to flee', as it did in Ancient Greek, unlike Modern Greek φεύγω 'to leave'.

(e) Vocabulary

(i) /καθφ/ 'better': in Modern Greek, normally καλύτερα, but classical καλλίστων.

(ii) /βρίκω/ 'I understand': in Modern Greek normally καταλαβώ, but Medieval ερθών.

(iii) /βδό/ 'I lick': in Modern Greek normally γλαφρά, but classical λέχον.

(iv) /μιζέρι/ 'elders': let. μείζότεροι, like καίνε μείζονες, for Modern Greek μεγάλοιτεροι.

(v) /καίρο/ — 'hit': Modern Greek normally χτυπάω, classical κρούω, 'Christian' Pontic κρούγω.

(vi) /νέο/ 'not', in the Of and Surnére areas only: in Modern Greek δεν, but Classical οὐκ.

(f) 'Accidental' parism

Some writers in Greece have suggested that Greek words they knew from Christian Pontic should be officially taken over to replace foreign ones used in Greek — the prospective change to be effected by inclusion in the authoritative Lexicon of the Academy of Athens — and that more terms of this kind should be sought in Pontic dialects. So, for instance, it has been recommended that instead of saying κομίζειν 'wife's brother' (from Venetian κουνάκο, unknown to Romayka speakers), Standard Greek would better (σωπήγατος καλλίτερος), like Pontic, to use the native, ancient (ελληνοτοπίτο) term γνωρικωδές. In the same vein, it has been
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urged that Greek replace μπατσανάκης, ‘wife’s sister’s husband’ (from Turkish bacakınak), with the Ancient Greek σύγγαμπός, a word still used in Pontic.73

While Romayka is innovative in many respects that would have pleased traditionalists, it would have delighted advocates of the lexical engineering of katharevousa with its countless spontaneous creations such as:

(i) /prετεγ/αριο “to accompany” (‘παρανικία) και πατε “take and go’.
(ii) /μπατσεγ/ος “unmarried [male]” (for ‘ο-μπατσεγιος, whereas in Modern Greek one says, somewhat confusingly, α-μπατσεγιος).

Greek purists would have been all the more thrilled with Romayka’s use of certain native Greek terms (with occasional parallels in other dialects) instead of the ‘foreign’ ones used in Greek. Amongst these are:

(iii) /ατσαγγα/ ‘milk-cream’, instead of the polysemous Standard Greek κρέμα (from Italian crema), or instead of Greek κρέμακα, which is from Turkish kremak.
(iv) /λετοκάρι/ ‘hazel-nut’ (in katharevousa λεπτοκάρινα, and exceptionally, in some forms of demotic Greek, λεπτοκάρια), rather than Greek φουντούκι (‘the hazel-nut’) (although ultimately from Greek ποντικός, possibly via Arabic).

These terms highlight the paradox of Romayka. A Turkish word may be used by Greeks in Greece, who, for instance, say γιαχτούτς ‘yoghurt’; this is from ‘Turkish yoğurt, a Turkish word adopted by almost all national, standardized European languages (despite their purism), as well as by many other languages, from Hebrew to Japanese. Romayka speakers, on the other hand – although they make no attempt to ‘purify’ their language, use Turkish every day, and live in Turkey – use a Greek word for it: /κασταγγα/.

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73 Lavrentidū (1985) 14.
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(iii) /atɔ̃gyala/ ‘milk-cream’, instead of the polysemous Standard Greek κρέμα (from Italian crema), or instead of Greek κρέματα, which is from Turkish kayma.
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