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DOES THE AROMANIAN HAVE A CHANCE OF SURVIVAL? SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE LOSS OF LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE PRESERVATION

Abstract: Of the four living varieties of Balkan or Southeast European Romance — Daco-Romanian, Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian and Istro-Romanian — only Daco-Romanian has been able to form a national language. Despite a written tradition dating back to the 18th century, most Aromanians today do not write their language. Due to the smaller number of speakers, the situation of Megleno-Romanian and Istro-Romanian is even more difficult. According to UNESCO (1999), (Daco-) Romanian is classified as *not endangered,* Aromanian as *endangered* and Istro- and Megleno-Romanian as *seriously endangered.* The paper analyzes impact of the following factors on Aromanian preservation: Lifestyle and patterns of settlement, Intensity of the contact, Religion, Linguistic prestige, Code function of minority languages, and Economic dependencies.

Key words: Aromanian, language death, obsolescence, minority language

How and why do languages die?

Languages can lose complexity, meaning and vocabulary under the massive superstratic influence of the language of administration. This is especially true of smaller language communities, the minority languages. The absorbing language does not in the long term possess sufficient integrative power among speakers of the younger generation to borrow the corresponding lexeme of the superstratum in a morphologically modified form. Languages which are cultivated and fostered through standardisation, a written form as well as through public administration, schools and the media, have far greater chances of permanent survival than do minority languages with a less highly developed written and administrative

language. But just as a language can be cultivated by diverse institutions and measures, it is equally possible to hasten the disappearance of a language through prohibition, suppression or neglect. However, even without any politically motivated repression of languages and dialects, languages can dwindle naturally in certain situations. Processes such as transformation and globalisation can influence the changeable variables of identity and culture, thus impacting on the language. Depending on age, the location of the town or village, the ethnic composition of the local population and the level of education of the relevant informant, it frequently degenerates into a language that is used only within the family circle.

A huge number of languages and dialects spoken today will die out during this century. The term *language death* is regarded by most authors as a process which starts long before the actual disappearance of the language (Thomason 2001: 223–225). It is therefore more accurate to speak of a *language dying*. According to Sasse's theory of language death (1992: 19), which is based on studies of Albanian speech fragments in Greece and Gaelic in East Sutherland, the disappearance of minority languages can be described as follows.

1. The *first stage* is attributable to external factors which lead to the uneven distribution of individual languages. The resulting pressure on the minority population produces a negative attitude toward the minority language, which in turn leads to a willingness or decision to give up one's own language in favour of the majority language.

2. In a *second stage*, historic conditions dictate a restriction of the languages spoken in the respective society. Speakers differentiate even more clearly when and with whom they speak which language. The continuous stigmatisation of the minority language drives the minorities to improve their knowledge of the majority language. This results in an increased prevalence of the majority language among the minorities, who have an urgent need of the majority language in ever increasing areas of their lives. Accordingly, parents are no longer able to pass on the ethnic language to their children, so that the use of the language remains restricted to the older generation. The majority language also increasingly dominates those areas of life in which the old language had previously been used. The situations in which it is used successively decrease, until finally it is no longer used in everyday situations. Ultimately, only a small number of people retain their knowledge of the old language, which is generally restricted to a few areas

and preserved only in meaningless phrases which serve as a secret language, or in the area of religion.

3. The *third stage* consists of the loss of the vocabulary and the inability to form words in those areas in which the majority language has already gained acceptance. Even if the minority language is regularly used in a number of areas, it will be unable to avoid borrowing an increasing number of elements. The borrowing of words and syntactic and morphological structures increases as the number of speakers from the minority become fluent speakers of the majority language. Once the passing of a language to the children has been interrupted, the progressive reduction of knowledge, also among the semi-speakers, becomes unavoidable. If the minority language possesses religious or social importance, words and phrases will be preserved. On the other hand, due to the death of the minority language, the mono-lingual society will also witness the emergence of a variety of the majority language which features influences from the minority language.

Experiments on the loss of the degree of differentiation of individual vocabularies (Labov 1976: 237) testify to the speed of language attrition in an advanced stage. Lexical borrowing is not usually associated with just one language, but is widespread in several languages. Examples of mutual borrowing in specialist terminology (e.g. Kahl 2007) show that the interferences never take place in one direction only.

A variety of factors influence the intensity of the language attrition and the speed at which a language dies.

Factor 1 "Lifestyle and Patterns of Settlement"

In a diachronic perspective, factors which lead to rapid linguistic change or language death include the establishment of the nation state with the accompanying enforcement of linguistic homogeneity, the establishment of an education system in the national language, increasing urbanisation, industrialisation, migration to the cities, and economic innovations, especially with regard to the media. Depending on the country and the dominant state ideology, standard languages are asserted at different speeds and with different degrees of consistency. Other accelerators are resettlements, mixed marriages and the dissolving of traditional communities. The preservation of old ways of life (e.g. arable farming, livestock farming), on the other hand, tends to have a conserving effect on the language.

In peripheral areas of settlement, the languages of small ethnic groups still survive today, apparently untouched by modern written culture, despite globalisation and the dominance of television and the mass media. Especially in the specialist terminologies, the vocabulary remains stable and the innovative vocabulary (as measured by the areas of everyday life which are subject to the technological changes) insignificant. At the same time, the level of an individual's knowledge varies according to how strongly that person is still linked with the old branch of economic activity.

In the case of nomadic populations (migrant workers, nomads etc.), it can be observed that as long as they travel in closed communities, they preserve their traditions and languages longer than do sedentary populations, but as soon as they become sedentary, they very quickly become willing to turn away from their culture and toward a different culture with greater prestige (see the factor 4, "Linguistic Prestige"). Urban cultures in particular, which to some extent are also adopted by the rural population, can also shape languages.

Factor 2 "Intensity of the Contact"

According to Sala (1997: 33), regions with a linguistically mixed population are characterised by direct *contact* situations, which in comparison with *indirect* linguistic contacts as a result of economic or political relations, have a stronger impact on the speaker, due to the intensity of the everyday encounters. Social and professional dependencies can lead to contact situations which create a basis for connecting elements in the folk culture which are reflected in identical or similar designations. Consequently individual terms can sometimes be comprehensible cross-linguistically and also across the boundaries of completely different languages, at least in economically important areas, permitting a certain degree of communication. The more intense ('more direct') the form of the linguistic contact, the greater the number of mutual borrowings will be. The numerous loan translations resulting from interference reinforce the lexical polysemy. At the same time, a tendency to bundle the meanings of a lexeme in a similar manner can be observed.

The co-existence of innovative and conservative linguistic features can be seen in connection with the demographic development of ethnic groups, namely as a linguistic tactic to preserve or weaken ethnic boundaries. Partial linguistic conservatism can function as an ethnic marker for the purpose of a tradition-oriented preservation of group coherence. This is especially true of ethnic groups which are permanently exposed to assimilation and which are forced to come to terms with their

multi-ethnic environment and to accommodate speakers of other languages, even if only for a short business discussion.

The parallel existence of two languages which enjoy equal standing leads to a mutual rapprochement (bilingualism, sprachbund), while the existence of a dominant educational and standard language threatens the non-standardised form and can lead to assimilation.

At the same time, it must be remembered that as soon as two or more languages are regularly used within the same social system, they start to differ substantially from the same languages spoken in separate social systems (Gumperz 1982: 66, 99).

Factor 3 "Religion"

Religious affiliation and the intensity of practical religiosity also provide an answer to the question of the use of regional and minority languages. It is generally easier to identify with adherents of the same religion than with members of different faiths. Hamp (1978: 155–162) noted that the greater the religious difference between a group and the surrounding society, the greater the chances of survival for the minority language. Religious affiliation can, therefore, in terms of language attrition play a crucial diachronic sociolinguistic role. In countries in which religion represents an important element of integration, groups of the same faith and differing languages have a greater tendency to give up their own language than in countries where the minority follows a different religion.

Factor 4 "Linguistic Prestige"

Speakers of the dying language avoid those forms which have a "negative sociolinguistic evaluation" in the dominant language, replacing them instead with a variant which enjoys greater prestige (Hamp 1989: 197–201). In many cases, this reveals the low social esteem in which ways of rural work and life are held. Consequently, speakers no longer view their cultural heritage with pride. On the contrary, they often regard it with shame and start giving preference to 'modern languages'. In the evaluation of a language by its speakers, cultural and mental characteristics, archaism, correctness and purity can all play a role. It is very frequently the case that the actual or supposed antiquity of a language or its separateness from other languages, are, in the eyes of the speakers, reasons for holding it in special regard.

The distasteful overtones, which since the end of the 19th century at the latest, have been attached to every mixture or hybridisation (Kremnitz 1994: 21), continue to cling strongly to the minority languages. Some

people even regard bilingualism as a disadvantage instead of as a potential advantage.

The negative attitude of the younger generations to the language of their ancestors is to a large extent responsible for language death. Dressler and Wodak-Leodolter (1977: 33–44) point out that negative stereotypes and prejudices generate inferiority complexes among the minorities, whose members want to give up their defamed role. While gender, ethnic origin and appearance cannot be changed, abandoning or limiting the use of a language represents the easiest way of solving this problem.

Factor 5 "Code Function of Minority Languages"

The question why minority languages, despite suffering from low prestige in many cases, are able to survive at all and continue to serve as a reference point in many communication situations can be explained, at least in the past, by their code function and their importance for communication within the family. The dramatic reduction in language use evidently does not prevent the continued use of the minority language in certain types of speech, such as storytelling, small talk and family greetings, song and proverbs, i.e. in specific situations.

Minority languages can fulfil the following communicative functions:
— As a *solidarity code* between members of the community in contrast to the state language (*power code*).
— As a means of setting themselves apart from monolingual people. In particular, the cryptolalic function of the local language served as a means of protection against gossip, abuse or conspiracy, as Kazazis (1976: 50) showed in his study of Arvanitika in Corinthia. This function is no longer of importance among the younger generation or has been reduced to short greetings in the minority language.
— As an *emblematic instrument* and symbol of belonging to an ethnic group. The language can be easily concealed vis-a-vis strangers, but emphasised at any time it is deemed expedient to do so.
— As a *vocational* or *secret language.* Tailors, bricklayers, beggars, thieves and individual trade guilds used to have codes which they used among themselves and which were inaccessible to members of other professions. The deliberate borrowing of words from another language for the purpose of remaining incomprehensible to outsiders can be observed in situations of political uncertainty.

Factor 6 "Economic Dependencies"

Affiliation to state entities, international alliances, economic pacts, political and ideological blocks can influence communities of speakers. Languages and dialects which play no economic role within these unions have a hard time preserving their significance other than as local or family languages. People will cultivate the language in which they earn their living for existential reasons alone. Depending on the condition and status of the minority languages, the 'bread-and-butter language' is able to displace other languages. If a language is given up more or less consciously, a cost-benefit logic is mobilised, although the speaker must first be convinced that the language is suitable for effective communication and will benefit him. To this extent, language death may be regarded as a competition between two structural forms for dominance in the performance of certain functions.

Where is Aromanian in this Process?

Of the four living varieties of Balkan or Southeast European Romance — Daco-Romanian, Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian and Istro--Romanian — only Daco-Romanian has been able to form a national language. Despite a written tradition dating back to the 18th century, most Aromanians today do not write their language. Due to the smaller number of speakers, the situation of Megleno-Romanian and Istro-Romanian is even more difficult. According to UNESCO (1999), (Daco-) Romanian is classified as *not endangered,* Aromanian as endangered and Istro- and Megleno-Romanian as *seriously endangered.*

In the case of the Aromanians, with up to half a million potential speakers in South East Europe, numerically the strongest group among the Southern Danubian Romance peoples, increasing activities to cultivate the language provide cause to believe that their languages can be preserved in individual locations. Their main problem is of a political nature and has been fittingly described by Peyfuss (1974) as the 'Aromanian question'. In areas where they have lived and worked for generations, the Aromanians are regarded by the majority populations there as part of the community. Their important role in the history, politics and economies of the countries of South East Europe and their dispersal propels them into a dilemma. Whenever the 'great men', be it Georg Sina in Greece, Pitu Guli in the Republic of Macedonia or Andrei Şaguna in Romania, are called members of a minority — the outrage is the same everywhere.

Nowhere, except in the Republic of Macedonia, does Aromanian receive state support as a minority language, which is why the majority of

Aromanian activities (television and radio programmes, tuition in schools, festivals) take place in this country. In Albania and Greece, Aromanian is the living language used for colloquial speech by large minorities, but it is neither taught nor used in church, except for optional Aromanian tuition in Divjakë in Albania. In Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania, Aromanians are a small immigrant community, whereby in Romania after 1990 Aromanian radio programmes were launched and the possibility of optional Aromanian tuition created at two schools in Bucharest and Constanţa.

In the case of the Aromanians, the impact of the factors referred to above can be described as follows:

Factor 1: Lifestyle and Patterns of Settlement

The turn away from old forms of economic activity such as long--distance pastoralism rapidly accelerates the pace of linguistic assimilation. Previously socially self-contained pastoral societies have modernised themselves, in some cases becoming urban societies with a large number of mixed marriages. The scattered pattern of Aromanian settlement also contributes to assimilation into majority communities. The insular distribution of these settlements over broad swathes of South East Europe has resulted in a loss of contact between individual population groups, in many places pushing relationships with larger neighbouring peoples into the forefront. Moreover, both main dialects, *rrămăneşti* (Farsherot in the larger sense) and *armâneaşti* (Aromanian spoken in the Pindos), can be found scattered in a wide area. Identical dialects exist in places that are hundreds of miles apart, while villages which are adjacent to one another have completely different forms of speech.

The increase of sedentary localised settlement and the resulting greater access to education and administration explains both the high level of assimilation of the Aromanians by Greek-speaking population groups who were urbanised earlier, as well as the assimilation by Romanian--speaking arable farmers of the non-Romanian groups who became sedentary at a later date.

Factor 2: Intensity of the Contact

Both the *par excellence* employment of the Aromanians as pastoral nomads and their activities as traders and transporters of goods require a maximum degree of mobility. Many traders spent most of their time far away from their language area. Over time, trading relations to the Greek market, upon which many Aromanians were economically dependent, intensified. In language use between three generations of family members,

situational code switching occurs, while the extent of *conversational code switching* (Gumperz 1982) varies greatly according to the ethnic and political identity of the speaker. In contact with other peoples the respective official languages are used, while today Aromanian plays no role in interethnic communication and is thus largely restricted to use within the family.

Factor 3: Religion

We assume that a minority language has greater chances of survival if the religion of its speakers differs to those of the surrounding society. In the case of the Aromanians in Albania, it would not, therefore, be surprising if in the long-term, the awareness of religious difference to the predominantly Muslim Albanians did not have a conserving effect on their language. In Greece, however, where the Greek Orthodox religion is an important element of integration, following the same faith encourages assimilation. The situation is similar in other predominantly Orthodox countries.

Factor 4: Linguistic Prestige

Speakers of Aromanian, especially in Greece, frequently disparage their language as an impure mixture of various languages, with this 'bastardisation' being the most common argument for its worthlessness and the absurdity of learning it. Assuming that Aromanian would present an obstacle to learning Greek, Albanian etc., their incompetence in the official languages (which has since been overcome) in the past provided a reason for giving up their own language in favour of the official language. The reason for the strong willingness to abandon Aromanian in Greece is to be found in the factor of linguistic prestige. In the long term, the language will have no chance of survival if in the near future it is not given greater appreciation and a form of support is not found that is also favoured by its speakers. In Albania, Aromanian enjoys greater prestige than is the case in Greece and therefore, despite the speakers of the language being widely dispersed, has a certain chance of survival if measures are taken to preserve it. In Romania, Aromanian is regarded with sympathy, because despite the great geographical distance to Romania, the Aromanians have, to some degree, preserved a kind of Romanian cultural heritage due to their language. The desire for recognition for a separate Aromanian language is therefore met with incomprehension. The Aromanians' association with the anti-Communist Legionary movement continues to influence the regard in which they are held in Romania. However, the dominant cliché

immediately links them with shepherds in the minds of all ethnic groups in South East Europe. The association with a coarse pastoral language is correspondingly widespread, a stereotype which has an extremely negative impact on the Aromanians' self-confidence.

Factor 5: Code Function of Minority Languages

For bilingual persons, divergence can serve as an important tactic for maintaining inter-group distinction and affirming identity (Sachdev & Giles 2004: 358), which is why language can act as an ethnic marker. As the language is economically irrelevant and is also increasingly losing ground even within the family circle, none of the code functions described above is now so important as to make the language indispensible for its speakers. Code functions are therefore no longer so attractive that they play any role in preserving the language. If in the future, the prestige of the language and the self-confidence of its speakers are raised, this will also have a positive effect on the code role.

Factor 6: Economic Dependencies

The main reason for the decline in Aromanian is that the language is economically unattractive. It appears to offer no advantage in any modern, future-oriented profession. Accordingly, Aromanians show the following patterns of communication: In most Aromanian villages, people over the age of 60 are active (generally bilingual) speakers, those over the age of 40 are passive or potential speakers, while the younger generations are already making their careers with no knowledge whatsoever of the minority language. It is not rare to find families in which the oldest members have only a poor knowledge of the standard language and the youngest no knowledge of the minority language. The language is now only rarely acquired during childhood and thus no longer plays the role of a mother tongue in the true sense of the word. The original consecutive bilingualism has therefore been abandoned, what was formerly the first language is now the secondary language within the family. Cases of simultaneous, early bilingualism are extremely rare. Nowhere today does Aromanian have the capacity to assimilate other groups of speakers. Until the 18th century, it seems to have exerted a strong assimilatory pull in the prosperous mountain villages. As the density of interferences declines with rising levels of education, complete linguistic assimilation to the economically more significant official language with the corresponding diatopic exclusion, diastratic and diaphasic differentiation (Haarmann 1979: 284f.), is not far off.

The discussion of the Aromanians and their language is dominated by three major controversies.

Controversy 1: Are the Aromanians a minority or members of the respective titular nation? If they are the latter, then which state can regard itself as the mother country of the Aromanians?

After the 1860s the Romanian state tried to develop and promote a school system with a strong Romanian character in the Aromanian settlements of the Southern Balkans. Around 1900, there were a good 100 Romanian schools in operation in Macedonia and Epirus. However, as Romania did not aim to establish Aromanian as a literary language, instead intending to turn their linguistic relatives into Romanians, the movement did not find many adherents among the Aromanians. The result was a conflict of principles which actually even furthered the Hellenisation of many Aromanians. In most towns and villages, attendance was higher at Greek schools. The lowly status of (Daco-) Romanian among Aromanians in Greece and the deep rooted fear there of 'Romanian propaganda' will hamper any initiative on the part of Romania to nurture Aromanian today. That West European institutions are not exactly welcomed by Aromanian associations in Greece is shown by the regular letters of protest from the Association of Pan-Hellenic Aromanian Cultural Societies to European politicians and scholars (see *http://vlahos.xan.duth.gr/*). Bearing these reactions in mind, it is hard to avoid the impression that a dissociation from Romanian would ensure better chances of survival for Aromanian.

There is a clear answer to the question as to which state may regard itself as the "mother country" of the Aromanians: While responsibility for the preservation of the Aromanian language rests primarily with the Aromanians themselves, it is the duty of *every* state to do what it can to protect the cultural heritage that is present on its territory. Given their small numbers today, but above all because of the historic loyalty that Aromanians have repeatedly shown to their home states, countries with Aromanian minorities have absolutely no reason whatsoever to fear irredentism and can therefore really be encouraged in their efforts to preserve the Aromanian language. On this note, it would be desirable if politicians, especially in the two countries which are most vocal in laying claim to the Aromanians, were to adopt a rather more relaxed attitude with regard to the search for an Aromanian identity. This applies especially to politicians of Aromanian descent, who were always stronger advocates of their own assimilation than the political representatives of the majority populations.

Controversy 2: Is Aromanian a language or a dialect?

Aromanian is regarded by many scholars (above all, by those from Romania, such as Papahagi 1974, Caragiu Marioțeanu 1975, 1977, Carageani 2002, Turculeț 2002, Saramandu 1984, 2003), as a Romanian dialect. However, today, due to its parallel separate development and structural differences, it is increasingly regarded as a language in its own right (inter alia Černjak 1990, Bara 2007).

With at least the same intensity that Aromanians have in recent decades come to regard Aromanian as a separate language, criticism of this point of view has grown among Romanian linguists and politicians. In this context, it is frequently overlooked that this is ultimately a matter of simple definitions, which are merely being exploited for political purposes. It is easy to find any number of examples of standardised languages which are closer to one another than are Aromanian and Romanian (e.g. Macedonian and Bulgarian), but equally there are plenty of examples of dialects of one and the same language which are further apart (e.g. Cypriot Greek and Black Sea Greek). Aromanian will certainly find it easier to prevail in the long term as a recognised minority language with a standardised form of speech.

However, decisions need to be made with regard to the existence of diverse dialects and sub-dialects and the different degrees of assimilation. On the one hand, rare linguistic forms should be studied and documented, on the other, individual dialects should not be overrated, because ultimately only the advance of a standardised literary language in an international consensus can contribute to preserving the language.

Controversy 3: Which orthography should be used for Aromanian?

Despite the existence of Aromanian writing, Aromanian has mainly survived since the 18th century as a language which is used within the family circle, which is why it has not been institutionalised and systematically standardised as were the official languages. Even the very earliest attempts to raise Aromanian to a literary language (18th century) suffered from a conflict of ideas. On the one side, there were authors such as Daniel of Moschopolis and Theodoros Kavalliotis, who merely used Aromanian to spread the Greek language and therefore wrote it using the Greek alphabet; on the other, authors such as Michail Bojadshi and Georg Roja, who, conscious of the Romance origins of their language, used the Latin alphabet and soon developed romanophile tendencies. Due to the parallel existence of several schools, there is to the present day no shared

consensus regarding Aromanian spelling. However, the many Aromanian publications (see Kahl 2005) provide reason to believe that Aromanian has long since begun to develop from an unwritten folk language into a standardised general language. In this respect, the orthography of the Aromanian language remains a point of contention. The prevailing view in Greece is that Aromanian cannot be written and that anybody who tries to do so using Latin letters has immediately outed themselves as a romanophile, whereas in Romania, deviation from the Romanian standard alphabet is met with incomprehension, even outrage.

With regard to the question of the 'correct' orthography, it can be said that surely no other alphabet appears more suitable for writing a Romance language than the Latin alphabet. Those who advocate the use of the Romanian alphabet to render Aromanian can be reminded that there is a long tradition of using this alphabet without Romanian diacritics, as was done by Boiagi as early as 1813. After all, alternative combinations of letters are possible in other languages, without it becoming a political issue. It should be borne in mind that it troubles no one when, for technical reasons, German words such as Maßeinheit, Märchen, Mörder and München are spelt as Masseinheit, Maerchen, Moerder and Muenchen. A similar tolerance that would permit the parallel use of *ş* and *sh*, *ţ* and *ts*, *n'* and *nj*, and *l'* and *lj* has not yet been achieved among the Aromanians of South East Europe. No matter whether people write Aromanian using the Romanian orthography, the Boiagis alphabet, Albanian orthography or even Greek or Cyrillic letters, they generally have one thing in common: They all have a concern for the written form of the Aromanian language and its preservation. Where there is a genuine interest in preserving a dialect or language, definitional problems cannot be allowed to pose an obstacle. The prime objective should be a common, uniform written form; but those who challenge individuals or groups who use diverging systems, forget that they are all basically pursuing the same objective. The simplest solution would surely be to implement the form agreed at the conference of Bitola (Cunia 1999) as the standard.

However, the main emphasis should be on raising the language prestige, its public standing and the self-confidence of its speakers. Existing written documents, especially the valuable examples of early Aromanian writing from the 18th and 19th centuries should be made accessible to a broad public. In the long term, their circulation would weaken clichés about the 'unwritable', 'poor idiom'. Subsequently, on the basis of a uniform written form, textbooks should be drawn up, optional tuition permitted and cultural events (reading competitions, literary evenings, readings of fairy tales etc.) should be organised. In order to gain maximum

acceptance, these initiatives would have to be carried out by local residents and not imposed by outsiders.

Other Approaches

A modest approach which remains close to the truth is always to be recommended when attempting to protect minority languages. The urge to prove the longest possible written tradition and an ancient and glorious history can spawn comical and even dangerous results. With no regard for content or linguistic quality, literature is produced in the dialect or language to be preserved simply so that it can be said that the Bible, the Odyssey, Shakespeare or Goethe are available in translation. At the same time, it is forgotten that there is perhaps a lack of much more basic works (primers, comprehensible grammar, geography, history) which could make a far more effective contribution to spreading the language. The poor condition of the language creates a temptation to take hasty action for which it is far too early. How should the Aromanians in Greece (where most Aromanians live) read the Bible in Aromanian, when, for example, the attempt at a translation by Cuvata (UCAM 2004) obsessively avoids the use of liturgical Graecisms which have naturally entered the Aromanian language? Just as the religious terminology of (Daco-)Romanian is influenced by Old Church Slavonic, the Aromanians have borrowed all key terms from Greek and this quickly comes apparent by taking a brief look at the dictionaries by Daniel of Moschopolis (1802), Kavalliotis (1770) and Nikolaidis (1909). Equally, publications on the supposed Pelasgic or ancient Macedonian origins of the Aromanians will, first and foremost, provoke aggressive reactions on the part of other ethnic groups, and are therefore hardly likely to represent a successful instrument for bolstering Aromanian self-confidence.

The tendency to absorb foreign elements, which Aromanian speakers perceive as linguistic insufficiency, certainly does not have to be an expression of weakness in the area of morphology, it can also be used to enrich and consolidate a language. This is easily demonstrated at the start of a conversation when Aromanians, depending on their origins, are unable to understand the statement "I understand" or "I do not understand." The reason for this is the numerous transferences of abstract vocabulary from neighbouring languages. Among the words derived from Latin, there is a choice of *prindu* (< Lat. *apprendere* apprehend), *acaţu* (< Lat. *accaptiare* conceive, grasp, comprehend), (*a*)*nţilegu* (< Lat. *intelligere* understand), which is frequently heard in Metsovo, *l'au* (< lat. *levare* take, comprehend) and *l'au di hābari* (< Lat. *levare* + Trk. *haber* literally, to take in news). The widely used *duchescu* is related to the Albanian words

ndjek (follow), *dukem* (think; Papahagi 1974: 505) and dialectic Greek δοκάω, αδουκώ and δουκειούμι (recall, understand). The neologism *cuptescu* (< Alb. *kuptoj* understand), heard among the Aromanian community in Albania, is derived from Albanian. In contrast, *achicha-sescu* (< Greek απεικάζω comprehend), which is used in the Aromanian spoken in the Grammos Mountains is derived from Greek. Finally, I would like to mention *angāldāsescu* (< Trk. dialect *angıldamak*, to call the buffalo), a word which to my knowledge has not been lexicographically recorded. This is used by the Aromanians known as Varghareni, who immigrated to Romania via Bulgaria. I have already said that this ability to absorb is not a linguistic weakness. The weakness is that the different varieties are not spread and taught, and are therefore unknown to many speakers.

The peripheral location of Aromanian areas of settlement and the poor political and economic conditions for research have ensured that Aromanian remains inadequately studied to the present day. In Greece, where the largest number of Aromanians live, the lack of Romance studies and the widespread rejection of an Aromanian written form has meant that the language has not, with few exceptions, been studied. The populations in the countries concerned are barely conscious of the existence of Aromanian. The low level of general knowledge about the Aromanians means that in many areas of their history and culture it is amateur scholars who have become their spokesmen. Greater interest on the part of scholars and the spread of general knowledge about the Aromanians would therefore be another important contribution.

Relations between the Aromanian communities in the diverse countries are also in need of improvement. When Aromanians from different countries and political camps meet, it should always be remembered that this background of coming from a different state cannot be simply ignored, and that almost no one defines themselves solely in terms of their Aromanian identity. It is precisely this identification with other nations which makes the international discussion among minorities so problematic; it will only be possible to work together successfully when this additional identity of the other is also accepted and valued.

It is surely beyond question that a number of factors which contribute to language attrition either cannot be influenced or that it would be utterly futile to try. Thus fundamental determining factors such as settlement forms, geographic distribution, social structure, international trade links, and the increasing importance of English will contribute to the disappearance of Aromanian with no possibility to counteract these natural processes. One should not therefore be tempted to attribute the sole

blame for the loss of minority languages to the majorities, and thus the speakers of the titular languages, the educational systems or the states. Speakers of dying languages are all too quick to complain of suppression — without considering that assimilation and language attrition are both natural processes which can occur even without any repressive measures. Day after day, languages disappear for the simple reason that in the peripheral locations inhabited by their speakers, it is not possible to institute a system which could ensure the survival of the dialect, because the endangered language offers its speakers no economic advantage or a different language simply has greater prestige, until in the end, they are willing to give up their own. Thus despite its status as the fourth official language in Switzerland, even Rumantsch is endangered. Aggression against the majority is not therefore a productive alternative. Ultimately, nor can the fears of the majorities be ignored. Majority languages can also become minority languages within only a few years. While today we discuss the difficult situation of Aromanian on the Balkans or Rumantsch in Switzerland, it is possible that the pressure of globalisation, assimilation and adaptation to English will, in a few generations, endanger one of the official languages. Then no one will be worried about preserving the small languages, for which it will anyway be too late, but with preserving Romanian and Albanian etc.

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