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## Assessing the sociolinguistic vitality of Istanbulite Romeyka: an attitudinal study

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### ABSTRACT

We assess the sociolinguistic vitality of Romeyka, the only Asia Minor Greek variety, which, albeit endangered, is still spoken in the Black Sea region, Turkey (historically known as Pontus), by means of nine extralinguistic (i.e. sociological) and sociolinguistic factors, specially tailored for the situation of Romeyka. Our current vitality assessment addresses an Istanbulite community, although the results will be compared against a rural community in the Black Sea, namely 'Anasta' [Sitaridou, I. 2013. "Greek-Speaking Enclaves in Pontus Today: The Documentation and Revitalization of Romeyka." In *Keeping Languages Alive: Language Endangerment: Documentation, Pedagogy and Revitalization*, edited by M. Jones and S. Ogilvie, 98–112. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press]. We used the direct approach to conduct an attitudinal survey – the first of its kind for Romeyka – which allows us to track the interrelation of vitality factors. The most relevant factors were (i) Turkish language policies and education; (ii) identity function of the language; and (iii) language competence. Furthermore, as an often-neglected factor, the language of data elicitation was shown to affect the answers of respondents. The following variables were also found pertinent: (iv) age, (v) gender, (vi) speech community; the latter is argued to constitute the most crucial factor for Romeyka's vitality.

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### KEYWORDS

Romeyka/Rumca; Pontic Greek; language vitality; Black Sea; Istanbul; Trabzon; language attitudes; language shift

## Introduction

Romeyka, an endangered variety of Asia Minor Greek still spoken in the Black Sea region of Turkey, lacks a comprehensive sociolinguistic investigation (but see Bortone 2009; Özkan 2013; Sitaridou 2013), despite a currently growing body of research on the synchrony and diachrony of Romeyka (see Guardiano et al. 2016; Michelioudakis et al. 2016; Michelioudakis and Sitaridou 2012; Michelioudakis and Sitaridou 2016; Sitaridou 2014a, 2014b, 2016). The objective of this paper is to assess the vitality of an Istanbulite Romeyka-speaking community against the rural community of 'Anasta' (a fictitious name for ethical issues) as described in Sitaridou (2013 et seq.), by means of an attitudinal survey, the first of its kind. It is expected that the findings will allow us to grasp the particular interrelation of factors, both sociolinguistic and extralinguistic ones, relevant to Romeyka's endangerment.

Language vitality assessment aims at defining the level of (vitality or) endangerment of a language by describing factors essential to its maintenance – such as domains of use, functions, and transmission – and is a precursor to language revitalisation and/or reversing language shift (see Brenzinger et al. 2003; Edwards 1992; Fishman 1991; Grimes 2000; Landweer 2000; Russell 2001). It is also known to be highly dependent on extralinguistic factors (see Poplack and Levey 2010). In this paper,

we provide a comprehensive vitality assessment of Romeyka based on the following criteria: (i) sociolinguistic and extralinguistic factors; (ii) interacting factors; and (iii) factors particularly relevant to the Romeyka situation.

Our working hypotheses are: (i) the extralinguistic factors (i.e. sociological factors such as language policy, speech community, language attitudes, and language identity) shape language vitality, whereas the sociolinguistic factors (i.e. language competence, intergenerational language transmission, domains of language use, and bilingualism) react to external influences and are, therefore, merely descriptive. As such, sociolinguistic factors are of indirect relevancy; (ii) certain extralinguistic factors are intertwined (for instance, language policy and linguistic identity): depending on the speech community, Turkish national and language policies contribute to the construction of language attitudes and, consequently, identity which, in turn, affects vitality levels; (iii) we consider speech community an important factor; consequently, we expect differences in vitality according to the rural-urban division; and, finally, (iv) speaker-related variables, such as age and gender, are expected to make a significant difference in language vitality because of how they influence language shift.

## Background information on Romeyka

Romeyka belongs to the Pontic branch of Asia Minor Greek. Sitaridou (2014a, 2016) advocates for the Hellenistic Greek roots of Pontic Greek in ‘leap-frog’ contact (in the sense of Chambers and Trudgill 1980) with other Greek varieties during the mediaeval times. Due to the 15–18c AD widespread islamization of the Christian Greek-speaking populations in the regions of Of<sup>1</sup> and Tonya (Vryonis 1986), around 17c AD, Pontic Greek diverged into two varieties: one spoken by Muslims and one spoken by Christians which progressively intensified contact with Modern Greek. Following the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which saw the relocation of all Christian-Orthodox Rums to Greece, the latter variety has since aligned to Modern Greek even more while the former, by virtue of being spoken by Muslims who were for reason of their faith exempted from the Treaty of Lausanne, has retained many archaic features. Although both varieties (as well as other Asia Minor Greek varieties) were historically referred to as ‘romeic(a)’, Romeyka today is only used to refer to the Greek variety spoken by Muslims in the Black Sea.

## Remarks on glossonymy

Despite the fact that Romeyka is the emic name, Mackridge (1987) uses the term ‘Muslim Pontic’ as a *terminus technicus* for the same varieties we document (a practice followed by Brendemoen 2006; Özkan 2013; and partially by Bortone 2009). However, we prefer the term /roméika/ in line with what the majority of speakers use (some speakers may also say /romáika/ or even /rumáika/) as it would be outside current academic practice to use a term that speakers themselves do not identify with. Based on the fact that Istanbulite speakers call their language by its Turkish name, namely Rumca, we will argue that the name speakers give to their language corresponds to language vitality (see also Sitaridou and Schreiber 2015). Lastly, when there is a need to indicate diatopic variation in Romeyka we do so by specifying the locality where Romeyka is spoken (e.g. Romeyka of Of (Çaykara), Romeyka of Sürmene, etc.).

## Number of speakers

According to Mackridge (1987) and Andrews (1989), the Romeyka-speaking community in the Black Sea area consists of approximately 5000 speakers. The figure they provide stems from the last available general census (*Genel Nüfus Sayımı*) from 1965, which records mother tongue. According to it, there were 4535 Romeyka speakers. However, this number may not reflect reality due to a biased choice of Turkish as mother tongue and exclusion of migration data (see also Brendemoen 2002; Mackridge 1987; Özkan 2013). An alternative way to approach this issue would be to rely

on the number of recorded inhabitants for the villages, in which we know Romeyka speakers live (see Bortone 2009; Brendemoen 2006; Özkan 2013; Sitaridou 2013). However, this method would also be problematic because of the practice of overstating the number of village inhabitants in census in order to attract greater financial state support (since often censuses are used to determine allocation of state resources across regions). Furthermore, individual competence in Romeyka depends on numerous variables such as age, gender, migration patterns, and language use in the family (see also Sitaridou 2013). Thus, providing an accurate number of Romeyka speakers is methodologically (How do we define a speaker?), legally (How do we conduct such a survey?), and practically (due to the diasporic nature of Romeyka) difficult to implement.

### Group identity

In the Istanbulite Romeyka-speaking community, desired and virtual assimilation to the Turkish mainstream comes with weak group boundaries, indicated, for instance, by loose marriage patterns. However, for the population of ‘Anasta’, Sitaridou and Tsiplakou (2012; Forthcoming) argue that there is a strong sense of cultural identity. Although the links between language and what informants construe as ‘identity’ are variable and multidimensional at best, the ‘Anasta’ interview data show a subtler story. The findings suggest that covert positive attitudes towards Romeyka are conflated with positive attitudes towards bilingualism as cognitive and social empowerment, which may constitute a position that undermines a dominant indexical order (in the sense of Silverstein 2003), locating Romeyka in the sphere of the private, that is, the culturally/locally valued, but not socially valued, *qua* linguistic capital. The same attitude, though less dominant, may hold true for the Istanbulite community where this positive view of bilingualism exists too, confirmed by the Turkish saying *bir dil, bir insan* ‘the more languages you speak, the more persons you are’.

### Location of the speech community

The remote location of the traditionally hermetic Romeyka-speaking community in the Pontic Alps (*Kuzey Anadolu Dağları*) facilitates (see Figure 1): (a) intense grammatical micro-variation resulting in three dialect areas (1); (b) archaisms (2); (c) but also contact-induced change (3).

- 
- (1) a. Inflected infinitive in Romeyka of Sürmene:  
*K = eθelesa mairepsina.*  
 NEG=wanted.1SG cook.INF.1SG
- b. Plain infinitive in Romeyka of Çaykara:  
*Utš eθelesa mairepsini.*  
 NEG wanted.1SG cook.INF
- c. Morphologically reduced plain infinitive in Romeyka of Tonya:  
*K = eθelesa mairepsi.*  
 NEG=wanted.1SG cook.INF  
 ‘I didn’t want to cook’.  
 (Sitaridou 2014a)
- (2) a. Preserved infinitive in *before*-clauses in the 40+ generation in Romeyka of Çaykara:  
*prin mairepsini, eyo ...*  
 before cook.INF I.NOM
- b. Infinitive in *before*-clauses replaced by a *na*-clause in some speakers of G3 in Romeyka of Çaykara:  
*prin na mairevo*  
 before PRT cook.1SG  
 ‘before I cook ...’  
 (Sitaridou 2013)
- (3) a. Nominalisations in Romeyka of Çaykara:  
*Ap ađa so spitin ts Aişes to panimon θelo.*  
 from here to.the house the.GEN Ayşe.GEN the going want.1SG  
 ‘I want Ayşe to make her way from here to the house’.

## b. Nominalisations in (Standard) Modern Turkish:

*Ayşe-nin bu ev-den git-me-si-ni ist-iyor-um.*

Ayşe-GEN this house-ABL go-VN-POSS-ACC want-IMPF-1SG

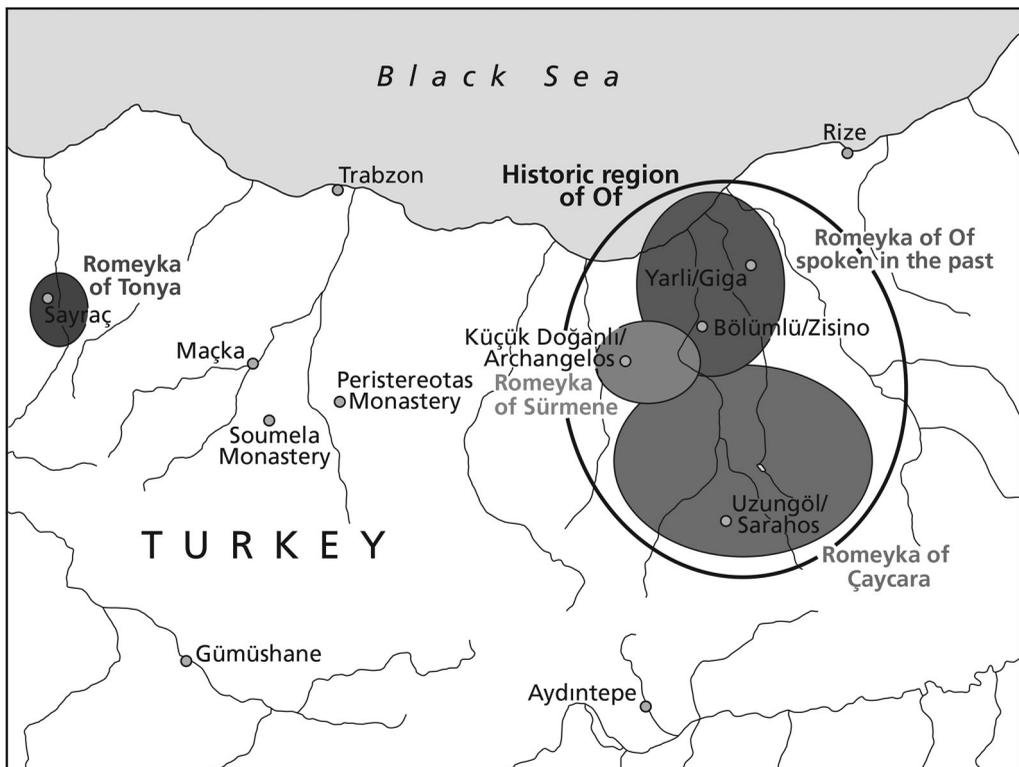
'I want Ayşe to leave this house' (lit. 'I want Ayşe's going (away) from this house')

(Sitaridou 2014a, 2014b, also in connection to Hellenistic nominalisations)

Moreover, the traditional semi-pastoral lifestyle at steep mountain sides produced a lifestyle-specific vocabulary containing terms for traditional work practices, tools (i.e. *kudal* [>κοντάλιν 'spoon' in Mediaeval Greek, 'a mixer made out of pine wood for producing yoghurt']), products (i.e. *minzi/diri*, 'village cheese'), and botany (i.e. *zagoda*, 'a fragrant herb growing at the mountain pastures') which, in absence of equivalents in Turkish, survived in the Turkish vernacular, too.

### Mobility and migration

Before bridge and road construction in the area started in the 1960s, contact between the Eastern Black Sea and Istanbul was limited to the seaway. However, after the establishment of road connections between Trabzon and Istanbul, high numbers of Black Sea people were among the first internal labour migrants in Turkey moving to Istanbul. Due to weak economic opportunities in the area, migration was a threatening factor for traditional ways of life in the Black Sea (Brendemoen 2002) and continues to be, albeit to a lesser extent. From at least since 2004, there has been considerable development of tourism and infrastructure creating many jobs regionally (see, for instance, the construction of luxury residential properties and the Varlıbaş



**Figure 1.** ROMEYKA-speaking enclaves in the district of Trabzon (Sitaridou 2013, 99). Source: Figure 8.1 from: Sitaridou (2013). © Cambridge University Press 2013.

shopping centre in Trabzon as part of the ‘Tourism Island’ project). Despite people not emigrating as much as in the past, migration to Trabzon has been on the rise with urbanisation reaching the heartland of Pontic Alps by means of new roads and high-rise buildings instead of traditional wooden houses.

## Language vitality assessment

Rather than being a matter of maintenance or death, language vitality can be understood as the continuum between stable vitality > contact-induced change in progress > radical shift in progress > death (see Landweer 2000). Language shift is influenced by an interwoven set of sociolinguistic factors, which affect language use: languages can be endangered with regard to some factors but promoted by others at the same time (see, for example, revitalisation efforts). Consequently, careful monitoring of the influence of each vitality factor is required.

### Brief history of previous vitality assessment efforts

Language vitality assessment methods have developed from a catalogue of quantitative measurements (see Sallabank 2011) towards a more fine-grained methodology, taking sociological factors and ethnographic research methods into consideration (see Edwards 1992; Fishman 1991; Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977; Landweer 2000, i.a.). Recent research agrees that language vitality needs to be assessed separately for each language according to the variables that are most meaningful to its situation.

Table 1 outlines the most common vitality assessment approaches in order of their appearance, that is, (i) Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor’s (1977) ‘Ethnolinguistic vitality’; (ii) Fishman’s (1991) GIDS; (iii) the Ethnologue’s system (see Grimes 2000); (iv) indicators of ethnolinguistic vitality by Landweer (2000); (v) the UNESCO’s factors (see Brenzinger et al. 2003); and (vi) Lewis and Simons’ (2010) Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS).

The UNESCO model of Brenzinger et al. (2003) has been particularly influential as it highlights the role of speakers and language use over time (see Obiero 2010). Simultaneously, it emphasises the interplay of extralinguistic factors (economic, religious, cultural, or educational) and the importance of group-internal forces (language attitudes). Furthermore, the approach emphasises the importance

**Table 1.** Overview of previous vitality assessment approaches.

Framework	Reference	Model	Main factors
Ethnolinguistic vitality	Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977)	3 variables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Status/prestige</li> <li>– Demographic strength</li> <li>– Institutional support</li> </ul>
Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS)	Fishman (1991)	8 stages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Language transmission</li> <li>– Official function of the language</li> <li>– Domains of language use</li> <li>– Literacy</li> </ul>
Evaluative system for language vitality of the <i>Ethnologue</i> (14th ed.)	Grimes (2000)	5 stages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Population size</li> <li>– Ethnic identity</li> </ul>
Indicators of ethnolinguistic vitality	Landweer (2000)	8 stages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Population</li> <li>– Group dynamics</li> </ul>
UNESCO’s factors of language vitality and endangerment	Brenzinger et al. (2003)	9 factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Domains of language use</li> <li>– Intergenerational language transmission</li> <li>– Language attitudes</li> </ul>
<i>Ethnologue</i> ’s Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS)	Lewis and Simons (2010)	13 levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Language transmission</li> <li>– Domains of language use</li> <li>– Literacy</li> <li>– Ethnic identity</li> </ul>

of a purpose-related evaluative vitality measurement and suggests that self-assessment of speakers should be considered together with external evaluation of language vitality.

### Earlier vitality classifications of Romeyka

Classifications of Romeyka as such in terms of endangerment do not exist whilst the ones about Pontic Greek vary greatly between different frameworks (see Table 2) and do not make clear whether Romeyka has been taken into account.<sup>2</sup>

### Factors for vitality assessment in Romeyka

After determining suitable vitality factors to suit the terrain and community, we compiled the following list of nine vitality factors to be tested:

- (I). Linguistic Competence
- (II). Intergenerational Language Transmission
- (III). Domains of Language Use
- (IV). Bilingualism
- (V). Language Attitudes
- (VI). Identity Function
- (VII). Language Policies and Education
- (VIII). Speech Community
- (IX). Number of Speakers

The vitality framework to be tested here is different from all those found in Tables 1 and 2 as it combines factors from different approaches in order to explore the mechanisms of their interrelation, that is, extralinguistic (sociological) factors such as language identity (see Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977; Landweer 2000) and speech community (see Edwards 1992), and sociolinguistic factors like the state of bilingualism (see Lewis, Simons, and Fennig 2016).

In terms of factor (IV), bilingualism should not be interpreted as a typical indicator of language endangerment although stable bilingualism may hint at language maintenance (Edwards 1992). We consider this factor to comprise several sub-factors, such as the state of bilingualism, L1/L2 acquisition patterns, and attrition, which have all been assumed in the literature to exert influence on language maintenance (see Sallabank 2011, i.a.). However, it should be noted that the present study was not designed to measure the influence of contact-induced change and attrition on language vitality; rather, any claims about bilingualism stem from the speakers' reported perceptions. In terms of factor (IX), we do not consider a high number of speakers to necessarily imply high

**Table 2.** Earlier vitality classifications of Pontic Greek.

Framework	Vitality classification	Evidence based on ...	Source of information
UNESCO's <i>Interactive Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger</i> (Moseley 2010)	'Definitely endangered'	– Number of speakers – Intergenerational language transmission	Drettas (1997)
<i>Encyclopedia of the World's Endangered Languages</i> (Moseley 2007)	'Seriously/severely endangered'	– Intergenerational language transmission – Age of speakers – Prestige/social status	Salminen (2007)
<i>Endangered Languages Project</i> (Catalogue of Endangered Languages 2015)	'Threatened'	– Domains of use – Speaker number trends – Transmission	<i>Encyclopedia of the World's Endangered Languages</i> (Moseley 2007)
<i>Ethnologue</i> (Lewis, Simons, and Fennig 2016)	'Vigorous' (6a) <sup>3</sup>	EGIDS levels	Diakonikolaou (2009) is reportedly the source

language vitality; however, this factor can be meaningful in expressing a tendency for the likelihood of language maintenance within the next few decades.

## Methods

### Subjects

Data were collected from two different speech communities in Turkey and one control community in Berlin: (i) data from an Istanbulite community were gathered in February 2014 in Istanbul, Bahçelievler. We interviewed 22 respondents of the Istanbulite Romeyka-speaking community, which consists of two related families living in a close network in the same neighbourhood. Its members migrated to Istanbul in the 1980s from ‘Canlısu’ (a fictitious name for ethical issues), which is located in the Çaykara district; (ii) data from a comparison group comprising three respondents originally from the village of ‘Canlısu’, Çaykara district, but now living in Trabzon and in the town of Çaykara, were collected in August 2014; (iii) two respondents from Berlin functioned as the control group. Gender distribution of the overall 27 respondents is as follows: 21 females, 6 males. The unbalanced sampling is due to the male/female segregation in the speech community, whereby people of one gender have limited access to the opposite sex (see Sitaridou 2013). Speech community and gender aside, other social variables controlled for are age (13–78 years) and education. The age groups are chosen according to distinct phases of life caused by major changes such as school entry, marriage, or occupation and correspond for the sake of comparability mainly to the age groups in Sitaridou (2013). The age/gender distribution is displayed in Table 3.

### Approach to data collection and challenges in the field

Data were gained by means of a direct approach enhanced by participant observation and informal interviews. The elicitation material was adapted after a phase of piloting deemed essential in order to identify productive domain questions, to discover new relevant factors, and to familiarise the interviewer. Although attitudinal surveys allow the researcher to determine the importance of factors that affect language attitudes (see Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal 1981; Brenzinger et al. 2003), to elicit hidden attitudes and reveal covert factors and interrelations, self-assessment of linguistic behaviour cannot be the only means used but has to be coupled with the ethnographic approach (i.e. interviews not based on a questionnaire). The latter is known to bring to the fore difficulties when addressing delicate topics or taboos (see Garrett 2005). Indeed, Sitaridou (2013) reports that cultural identity is a delicate matter within the Romeyka-speaking communities; all the more given that ‘social desirability bias’ (see Garrett 2005) may then lead respondents to give replies that underline their Turkishness, especially when the researcher (i) is not from the community; (ii) carries out field work for the first time, and (iii) carries it out in Turkish, as it was the case in the present study (Schreiber 2016).

**Table 3.** Age/gender distribution of respondents.

Age*gender crosstabulation			
Count	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Age			
<16	1	0	1
16–32	9	2	11
33–49	3	2	5
53–66	5	2	7
>66	3	0	3
Total	21	6	27

Data collection turned out to be challenging at times despite the fact that the participants were approached through established contacts: some respondents hesitated to participate in the interview or to allow sound recording. Male respondents wanted to check the questions prior to the interview. Sometimes questions concerning attitudes towards Romeyka and desirability of language maintenance were rejected. A middle-aged female respondent interrupted the interview suspecting the researcher to be a Greek spy and threatened to call the police, as similarly reported by Brendemoen (2002). Interestingly enough, no such issues have ever arisen in the field of 'Anasta' (see Sitaridou 2013; Sitaridou and Tsiplakou 2012; *Forthcoming*).

### **Materials**

The questionnaire consists of 135 open and closed questions and is designed in line with the ELDIA EuLaViBar (European Language Vitality Barometer). Attitudes are elicited by means of a 'Semantic Differential' where participants are asked to assign selected adjectives to both Romeyka and Turkish. In addition, statements requiring agreement or disagreement are used in order to gain information about covert attitudes and identities. Difficulties occurred with the bipolar evaluative adjectives for language attitudes, since respondents refused to respond to this type of question, which could be interpreted as hesitation to differentiate between Turkish speakers and others due to the delicate question of group belonging. Furthermore, answers to hypothetical questions were difficult to elicit (which, interestingly, was not a problem at all in 'Anasta', see Sitaridou 2013; Sitaridou and Tsiplakou 2012; *Forthcoming*). Finally, note that the data about language competence of the speakers derive from self-reports of the respondents and not actual language testing.

### **Language of elicitation**

Turkish was chosen as the language of data collection given that only elderly respondents are still fluent in Romeyka in the Istanbulite communities whereas we aimed at a cross-generation investigation of attitudes. Furthermore, the interviewer was not competent in Romeyka (Schreiber 2016). Interference by the interview language was attempted to overcome by asking proficient respondents to answer selected questions in both Turkish and Romeyka; however, this mode of elicitation yielded poor results as respondents either denied their competence or misinterpreted the task. For the importance of the language of elicitation on attitudinal judgements, see also Sitaridou (2013).

### **Procedure**

The attitudinal questionnaire was administered orally (word of mouth procedure) because of (i) Romeyka being a language of oral tradition; (ii) generalised illiteracy among elderly female respondents (Sitaridou 2013); (iii) the fact that this method allows us to keep better track of the respondents' reactions to questions (see Henerson, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon 1987); and (iv) the general sensibilities and political controversies regarding Romeyka. Question and answer pairs were recorded and transcribed in suitable annotation software (Schreiber 2016).

### **Results and discussion**

The data were analysed both by means of quantitative and qualitative analysis, the latter included methods of content analysis. Qualitative analysis is more suitable for analysing gradual differences in attitudinal data as it allows deeper insights into the cultural processes at work behind the evaluative scores attributed to each answer. Descriptive statistics were applied incidentally for quantitative questions, although the number of respondents may not be sufficient to provide comprehensive statistical results.

Moreover, in the discussion, we actively seek comparisons with the speech community of ‘Anasta’ (as described in Sitaridou 2013 and other works), which is, importantly, part of the same dialectal group, namely the Ophitic one (Romeyka of Of).

### ***Bilingual language competence***

Within the Istanbulite community under study, Turkish and Romeyka are spoken as L1s to different degrees depending on the variables age and gender. Individuals of the youngest generation may speak Romeyka and English as L2s, and may also learn other European languages in higher and university education. All respondents above the age of 40 years can be considered bilingual, although some of them may not acknowledge Romeyka as one of their native/home languages due to negative attitudes towards this language or insufficient competence. Overall, bilingualism in Romeyka is transitional, showing a language shift toward the dominant language namely, Turkish. Above the age of 70, Romeyka is undoubtedly the L1.

The following correlation of age and language competence was proven by the descriptive statistics:

- (i) The younger the respondent, the lower their linguistic competence in Romeyka,  $p = .000$ ,  $r = -.724$ .
- (ii) The older the respondent, the less confident they feel in Turkish,  $p = .028$ ,  $r = .516$ .
- (iii) The L2 was found to correlate significantly with the variable age,  $p = .036$ ,  $r = -.420$ .

In addition to correlating with age, language competence was hypothesised to correlate with the variable gender (see Mackridge 1987; Sitaridou 2013). Although the present data do not show a significant correlation, this is considered to be due to the low number of male respondents in the present study. Importantly, in interviews (when qualitative questions were asked), the respondents themselves perceive gender differences in terms of frequency of language use, language competence, and codeswitching: while women are reported to have a better command of Romeyka and to use it more frequently, they are also reported to codeswitch more frequently (which is typical of bilinguals, see Poplack 1993, i.a.).

### ***Intergenerational language transmission***

Intergenerational language transmission in the Istanbulite community was found to be interrupted at (what is presently) the 50-year old generation. This disruption arose due to labour migration to urban centres in the 1980s due to: (i) loss of traditional ways of life; (ii) the breakup of social networks (see Milroy and Milroy 1985); and (iii) rapid assimilation towards Turkish mainstream. The political climate at the time was also damaging for minority languages (see Karimova and Deverell 2001) evidenced by the constitutional amendments of 1982 and the passing of the ‘Law Concerning Publications and Broadcasts in Languages Other Than Turkish’ (Law No. 2932, Article 26) which defined Turkish as the mother tongue of all Turkish citizens and prohibited the use of other languages as a mother tongue (see Haig 2003). Consequently, the Romeyka speakers, newly arriving in Istanbul as teenagers in the 1980s, were confronted with negative attitudes, which, due to peer pressure, were keen on dispersing. As a consequence, they ceased to pass Romeyka on to their children. This disruption in transmission has led, determined by social factors such as employment and degree of contact with the ancestral village, to differential acquisition patterns and varying degrees of bilingualism even among siblings.

Intergenerational language transmission and the state of bilingualism are found to be highly dependent upon the speech community as shown in the comparison of the communities in Istanbul and ‘Anasta’ (Sitaridou 2013). With the advantage of encountering four generations in the same

household, consider Table 4 whereby great-grandparents are G1, grandparents are G2, parents are G3, and children are G4:

Language transmission in ‘Anasta’ remained intact longer than in the Istanbulite community. The comparison of the linguistic cohorts reveals that, within the Istanbulite community, language shift has taken place within the last three generations: bilingualism shifted from nearly simultaneous bilingualism in the oldest generation, via additive bilingualism in middle-aged generation, towards heritage use of the language by the youngest generations. For the current generation of children, language shift has been completed. In the ‘Anasta’ speech community, however, Romeyka is still acquired as late L1 or early L2, and there are no heritage speakers so far (Sitaridou 2013).

### **Domains of language use and literacy**

Romeyka exists in a diglossic situation with Turkish, which, arguably, reflects a split linguistic identity (see Sitaridou 2013), consisting of Romeyka as a family language on the one hand, and of Turkish, a marker of the respondents’ national identity as well as predictor of economic success, on the other. This diglossic situation is fully recognised by the Romeyka speakers.

Moreover, Romeyka is solely a spoken language without any codified written form. The lack of an official writing system is very much frowned upon and often compared to the superiority of literacy in Turkish. The occasional use of Romeyka in social media is the only domain in which Romeyka appears in written form by use of the Turkish script. Therefore, it is not surprising that efforts to improve the official recognition of Romeyka are reportedly rejected (see also Bortone 2009; Özkan 2013). However, in ‘Anasta’ Romeyka is extensively used in text messaging and speakers persistently query about the progress of documentation and express their desire for a written code (Sitaridou, p.c.).

Language use of Istanbulite Romeyka depends on the following variables:

- (i) *Locality of the speech community*: In the Istanbul community, Romeyka is spoken in the informal domain only. Outside close networks such as family, Romeyka is only spoken within group members, that is, *Romeyka bilenler* ‘people who know Romeyka’, and rarely in the presence of non-speakers. All respondents agree that Romeyka use is not suitable in public places and social gatherings as they are aware of negative reactions by others. Crucially, in an in-group setting, Romeyka use still functions as a marker of group belonging. In ‘Anasta’, however, Romeyka is spoken more freely because (i) community networks are still intact and out-group contact is restricted; and (ii) Romeyka vocabulary suits the lifestyle. Consequently, in the villages, Romeyka is spoken in every place where locals meet: in the fields, in the school yard (only recently), at the mosque, in the summer pastures, and in shops.
- (ii) *Age and competence of the speakers*: Speakers of the eldest generation (G1) use the language among their peers and family for all purposes, although grandchildren often do not understand Romeyka sufficiently. The present data provide evidence that there is a significant relationship between the perceived use of Romeyka and the language competence,  $p = .047$ ,  $r = .428$ : the higher the Romeyka competence of the respondents the more they report speaking Romeyka

**Table 4.** Comparison of language shift in Istanbul and ‘Anasta’.

	Romeyka		Turkish	
	<i>Istanbul</i>	<i>‘Anasta’</i>	<i>Istanbul</i>	<i>‘Anasta’</i>
G1	L1	L1	L2	L2
G2	L2	(Late) L1	L1	(Early) L2
G3	L2 heritage	Late L1	L1	Early L2
G4	‘Dead’	Early L2	L1	L1

as useful; the higher they estimate its number of speakers; and the broader they perceive the use of Romeyka. Similarly, whether respondents expect Romeyka to become extinct or not is found to correlate significantly with the variable age,  $p = .025$ ,  $r = .440$ : the older the respondents, the less they expect Romeyka to become extinct. In G2, Romeyka is used for communication mostly with parents and with spouses especially when using it as a secret code in the presence of children (cryptoglossia); as well as occasionally with relatives and Romeyka-speaking friends. Romeyka has an emotional value arising from its function as a home and family language. This is indicated, for example, by the fact that many speakers reported that they would miss Romeyka if it was not spoken in the villages anymore. Speakers of G3 and G4 use only a few Romeyka words and expressions as heritage markers in their Turkish conversation. In these generations, there is no diglossic use of Romeyka due to lack of a distinct function of the language and competence of the speakers. Interestingly, members of G3 and G4 still use Romeyka nicknames in social media, which express heritage identity and function as group markers.

### **Language attitudes**

Language attitudes towards Romeyka manifest a continuum of overt and covert attitudes. In general, attitudes towards Turkish are expressed overtly, whereas attitudes towards Romeyka – except for regional stereotypes – are expressed covertly, as in fact, may well be the case with other minority languages in Turkey. Appreciation of Romeyka use, for example, is hidden under a general valuing of plurilingualism. More commonly, however, negative language attitudes persist and include the following perceptions: (i) the lack of domains of language use makes Romeyka obsolete; (ii) Romeyka is more difficult to speak than Turkish; (iii) Romeyka speakers are less educated and polite than Turkish speakers; (iv) Romeyka is not as functional as a standard language; (v) Romeyka is not a ‘real’ language due to its oral character (the lack of literacy leads to the perception that Romeyka has no grammar); and (vi) Romeyka is mixed with Turkish and, therefore, ‘corrupt’.

The following variables were found to affect language attitudes: (i) age; (ii) language competence; (iii) gender; (iv) speech community; and (v) the language of data collection:

- (i) On the whole, the attitudes of the younger generation were found to be more positive than those of the elder generations (but not necessarily of the eldest one, namely G1, see (d) below). In particular:
  - (a). The age of respondents was found to correlate significantly with any shame the respondents felt when speaking Romeyka,  $p = .006$ ,  $r = -.523$ . The majority of respondents of G1 felt ashamed of speaking Romeyka, whereas other respondents did not.
  - (b). The age of respondents was found to correlate significantly with respondents’ desires to see Romeyka in written form,  $p = .040$ ,  $r = .413$ . The majority of younger respondents want to see Romeyka in written form, whereas none of the G2 respondents does.
  - (c). The age of respondents was found to correlate significantly with the respondents’ desire for Romeyka to be maintained,  $p = .027$ ,  $r = .425$ . The older the respondents, the less they want Romeyka to be maintained. This finding correlates with the fact that elderly respondents are more aware of eventual negative effects of Romeyka language use for the younger generations, such as a hindrance to integration and economic success. Yet, this finding does not seem to conflict with the generally positive individual attitude of elderly respondents toward Romeyka as their mother tongue, a fact which is explained by the importance of mother tongue for one’s individual identity. Consequently, respondents with high Romeyka competence perceive Romeyka as a linguistic expression of their identity, which evokes positive attitudes (see (ii)).

- (d). Although we lack statistical evidence, qualitative assessment confirms that G1 members have ‘a double set of attitudes’, namely negative attitudes taken over from their children G2 (which have the most negative attitudes of all generations) as well as positive attitudes towards Romeyka as their L1 (because they feel fully confident in speaking) and home language (because it performs a strong identity function). It is precisely for these reasons that out of the two eldest generations, it is G2 the one with the most negative attitudes overall.
- (ii) The attitudes of respondents were found to correlate with language competence. The greater the language competence, the more respondents sought to speak Romeyka,  $r = .611$ ,  $p = .003$ , the more positive feelings towards Romeyka use they entertain (see also Özkan 2013).
- (iii) Gender was found to have an effect on attitudes, with females exhibiting more positive attitudes than men. This is confirmed by the finding that perceived pride of being a Romeyka speaker correlates significantly with the gender variable,  $p = .006$ ,  $r = .527$ . None of the male respondents was proud of speaking Romeyka, possibly due to more nationalistic attitudes in males.
- (iv) The (location of the) speech community was found to affect language attitudes, which are, for reasons described, more positive in the villages than in Istanbul (Sitaridou and Schreiber 2015; Sitaridou 2013).
- (v) The language of data collection must have affected the elicited judgements because language use constructs group boundaries by stimulating in-group demarcation, which, in turn, evokes more positive attitudes towards the interview language (see Sitaridou and Schreiber 2015). We assume that conducting the interviews in Turkish in the Istanbulite community together with the fact that the interviewer (Schreiber 2016) was not a member of the community elicited more negative attitudes towards Romeyka than it would have been the case if the same survey were conducted in Romeyka. In fact, this may explain, to a certain extent at least, the more positive attitudes of the Romeyka speakers of ‘Anasta’ since they were interviewed in Romeyka and the interviewer bears a more in-group type of relationship with the speakers (Sitaridou 2013; Sitaridou and Tsiprakou 2012; *Forthcoming*).

### **Identity function**

In Istanbulite Romeyka speakers, we find different forms of identity, such as national, citizenship, ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic identity, all interacting with each other. The way these identities interact in the speakers is understood as ‘acts of identity’ (see LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985). Language use expresses identification links and marks group affiliation and boundaries (see Tabouret-Keller 1997). Positive attitudes towards Romeyka are assumed to indicate strong identification.

Within the scope of the present attitudinal study, interruption in Romeyka language transmission corresponds to a shift in linguistic identity in favour of Turkish, which may also be an indicator of thoroughgoing cultural assimilation with Turkish mainstream society.

Multiple identities of Istanbulite Romeyka speakers interact as follows: (i) national identity: all respondents claim Turkish national identity; (ii) religious identity: Romeyka speakers have a strong Muslim identity (see Bortone 2009; Özkan 2013); (iii) ethnic identity: within the Istanbulite community, the awareness of the complex Greek–Turkish relationship is rather high and makes ethnic identity, on the whole, a sensitive topic (see Bortone 2009; Brendemoen 2002; Mackridge 1987; Sitaridou 2013). All respondents emphatically reject Greek identity and endorse a solely Turkish/Muslim identity instead (see Bortone 2009; Özkan 2013). Additionally, the desired assimilation to mainstream society is manifested by the fact that some Romeyka speakers adhere to an origins theory that seeks to deny the Rum origin of Romeyka speakers (see Bilici 2011). According to this theory, Rum people invaded Pontus and forced the autochthonous Turkish ancestors of Romeyka speakers to adopt the Greek language (note that a similar origins theory is found for the Hemshin of Rize, see

Simonian 2006, and the Laz, see Kutscher 2008). Interestingly, more nuanced data discussed in Sitaridou and Tsiplakou (2012; Forthcoming) show some cut-crossings compromising the otherwise seemingly conflicting identities of Turkish and Rum.

With regard to autoglossonyms, it is known that self-naming is an important expression of group identity functioning as a boundary marker (Tabouret-Keller 1997). The fact that the Istanbulite community consciously refers to its language with a Turkish term, namely *Rumca*, indicates the virtual and desired dominance of Turkish identity, and indicates weak ethnolinguistic group vitality (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977). Importantly, we must note the absence of any ethnonym in the Istanbulite community: the speakers refer to themselves as *Rumca konuşan/bilen* ‘Rumca speakers’, which indicates the importance of language competence, that is, linguistic identity, for group belonging. It is worth mentioning that the term *Rumcalar* ‘Rumca-speaking people’ came up once in an interview with an elderly female respondent confirming the importance of language competence as a group-demarking feature (cf. *Rumcalar* vs. *Rumlar* ‘Greek people’ – the latter not found in the Istanbulite data).

The labels used by the respondents to refer to the speakers of Romeyka were found to correlate significantly with the age variable,  $p = .033$ ,  $r = -.436$ . In particular: (i) the label ‘Turk’ is especially used by respondents of G1 and G2 aiming to emphasise their Turkishness; (ii) the impersonal term *Romeyka bilen* ‘person who knows Romeyka’ is mostly used by G2 but also by others; (iii) G3 respondents claimed to call Romeyka speakers by kinship terms, such as mother or grandmother, thus highlighting the affective value of Romeyka for these speakers; and (iv) G4 respondents stated that there is no name for Romeyka-speaking people which indicates their weak identification links towards Romeyka.

### Concluding remarks: factors most affecting linguistic vitality of Romeyka

Vitality was found to be affected by the following speaker-related variables: (i) age; (ii) language competence; (iii) gender. These variables affect language vitality in the following ways (see working hypothesis iv):

- (i) The older the speaker is, the stronger vitality is.
- (ii) The higher the linguistic competence of the speaker is, the stronger the vitality is.
- (iii) Females generally hold more positive attitudes than males.

Moreover, these speaker-related variables were found to interact with the following three vitality factors: (V) language attitudes, (VII) language policies and education, and (VI) identity function. This reflects our working hypothesis (i) whereby we assumed that the extralinguistic factors would exert a stronger influence on language vitality than the sociolinguistic ones. Indeed, the sociolinguistic factors (II) transmission, (III) domains of language use, and (IV) bilingualism seem to merely mirror the sociolinguistic situation of Romeyka which is mainly shaped by extralinguistic factors.

Crucially, the following vitality factors were found to be most relevant for the vitality of Romeyka: (I) linguistic competence, (VIII) speech community, (VII) language policies and education. Our findings show that, contrary to our working hypothesis (i), a sociolinguistic factor, namely linguistic competence, is highly important for language vitality.

As suggested by working hypothesis (ii), language vitality is shaped by the interaction of vitality factors:

- (I) The higher the linguistic competence, the more positive the attitudes, the stronger the linguistic identity, the better the language vitality. These findings can, however, be blurred by the interaction with negative attitudes from G2 (and G1 to some extent).

- (II) The speech community turned out to be the most decisive factor (working hypothesis iii) as language use patterns change even between neighbouring villages according to the following criteria (cf. Andrews 1989): (a) remoteness of the village; (b) inhabitanacy throughout the year; (c) outward migration; (d) stability of social networks (see Milroy and Milroy 1985); (e) preservation of traditional means of life; (f) lack of homogenising pressures emanated from the power centre more felt in the big cities rather than the countryside.
- (III) Language policy is a very important factor influencing attitudes towards language and identity especially in the urban Romeyka communities. The impact of the complex political atmosphere leading up to and during the 1980s (Atikcan 2010; Haig 2003; Karimova and Deverell 2001; Virtanen 2003) when most of the Romeyka speakers migrated to urban centres, is reflected in the negative attitudes of G2 who tried to rapidly assimilate abandoning any distinct group identity and ceasing to transmit Romeyka to their children.

To conclude, language vitality of Romeyka is much more threatened than suggested in the literature: (i) linguistic competence and transmission are very poor in Istanbul; (ii) language shift towards Turkish is complete in the younger generations in Istanbul (in line with Korth 2005); (iii) through change of traditional lifestyles hardly any domains remain for speaking Romeyka, at least in urban settings; (iv) there is a lack of a distinct group identity and poor identification links towards Romeyka, especially in younger generations, other than a generalised positive attitude towards multi-lingualism; (v) Turkish national ideology still aims to achieve the absorption of minorities and promotes a unitary, single identity; and (vi) linguistic and cultural assimilation toward Turkish mainstream goes hand-in-hand with negative attitudes towards Romeyka.

To end on an encouraging note, we remark that – as shown in the present study – the situation of Romeyka may be different in other speech communities (i.e. in Germany or the US or the Black Sea villages to some extent at least) with possibly different underlying mechanisms and thus vitality prospects. Moreover, at the time of print over 249,798 people, 4.7% of which from Turkey, have watched a University of Cambridge video on the work of the Romeyka project ([www.romeyka.org](http://www.romeyka.org)) – if anything, Romeyka has been given a prestige boost and possibly a renewed lease of life. Crucially, it will take far more for the situation to be reversed.

## Notes

1. The region of Ophis, usually referred to as Of, is a historical province in Pontus corresponding to modern-day Çaykara.
2. Pontic Greek uniquely identifies Greek spoken by Christians in Pontus and in Greece and diaspora from 1923 to the present.
3. The *Ethnologue* assigns languages with insufficient available data the EGIDS default value 6a. Hence, it is unclear whether the status of ‘Pontic’ as vigorous can be taken at face value given it has been reached on the grounds of insufficient data.

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