YOUNG BILINGUALS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE GREEK DIALECTS OF SOUTHERN UKRAINE

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1. The Greeks of southern Ukraine: a brief historical overview

Among the Greek communities of the Black Sea region a special place is occupied by the Greeks of the area of Marioupolis, a city situated on the northern shore of the Azov Sea in southern Ukraine. Marioupolis was named Zdanov during the Communist rule, and acquired again its former name in the '90s. It was built, along with twenty-four villages in the surrounding area, in 1779-80 by Greek settlers, who were invited by the Russian Empress Catherine the Great to leave their lands in the Tatar-occupied Crimean Peninsula, and start a new life across the border. To achieve her purpose, which was to strengthen her empire's defense by populating the border with Christian Orthodox settlers, Catherine offered the Crimean Greeks not only land and protection but also exemption from military service for one hundred years and permission to build their own churches and schools. In the city of Marioupolis a Greek prefecture and courthouse were established, with responsibility for administrative and legal matters. Between 1810 and 1859 Marioupolis and the surrounding –mainly Greek-populated villages- where considered the "Greek" administrative district. The Greek character of the area was reinforced by the arrival of thousands of Greeks from the region of Pontos (along the northern coast of Asia Minor) between 1828-1856, which led to the foundation of new villages. The state of relative autonomy lasted until about 1870, when these privileges were revoked, and there began –or continued, according to other sources- the mass settlement of other ethnic groups in the area (Photiadis, 1990: 36-41).

Fifty years later, many Greeks all over the newly formed Soviet Union embraced the ideals of the October Revolution. However, after 1937, Joseph Stalin's hostile policy towards the ethnic minorities within the Soviet Union led to the banning of

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Greek-language instruction in local schools and to the closing of Greek-language newspapers and periodicals[2]; thousands of Greeks were deported to Siberia or the Asian steppes, or faced the firing squad, charged with plotting secession. (Photiadis, 1995: 44-45; Kotsonis, 1999: 232). Persecution of Greeks left deep scars on the generations who grew up in this political climate, leading one to believe that the number of those who claimed Greek origin in the 1989 census is far lower than the actual number. It was only after Gorbachev and *perestroika* that the Greeks of the Soviet Union, as well as other ethnic minorities, dared reestablish their local cultural and folklore associations and openly seek recognition of their distinct ethnic identity.

In the 1989 census more than 358,000 people all over the Soviet Union claimed Greek descent. Among them, almost 200,000 live in the Ukraine[3]. Some 170,000 live in the Donetsk prefecture, where Marioupolis belongs. Of this total, about 24,000 live in Marioupolis, while an estimated 50,000 are scattered throughout the villages of the region around Marioupolis. Greek-origin citizens of the Ukraine have created local associations in various cities. Their activities are coordinated by the Federation of Hellenic (Greek) Communities of the Ukraine, founded in 1989. The Federation carries out various activities aiming at the promotion of Greek culture and Modern Greek language in the Ukraine and works in close cooperation with the Greek authorities both in Greece and in the Ukraine.

2. The 'Roumeika' dialects

Although the Crimean Greeks who responded to Catherine's invitation were all Orthodox Christians, not all of them spoke Greek. After centuries of living under the Tatar yoke, a number of Greeks had shifted to Tatar languages. In their new home, the two groups founded separate villages following the pre-emigration pattern. As a result, today there are two distinct groups of Greek-origin Ukrainian citizens in the Marioupolis area; (a) the Greek-speaking, who call themselves *Roumeoi* [ruméi] or *Tatoi* [tàti] (Zouravliova, 1995: 561; Photiadis, 1990: 42) and speak a group of Greek

[2] Between 1927-1937, a written version of the local dialects, based on the dialect spoken in the village of Sartana, was created. It was written in an alphabet composed of 20 Greek letters and 5 letter combinations which was used by Greek intellectuals in the Marioupolis area to print books and newspapers (Pappou-Zouravliova, 1999: 129).

[3] According to data from the Federation of Hellenic Communities of the Ukraine.

dialects (*roumeika* [ruméika]) and the Tatar-speaking, who call themselves *Ouroumoi* [urumi] and the Crimeo-Tatar dialects they speak *ouroumski* [urumski] (Zouravliova, 1995: 561). They are also called –by the Greek-speaking group– *Bazariotes* (Delopoulos, 1983: 269; Karpozilos, 1985: 104), a Greek word deriving from the Tatar name of Marioupolis, *Bazar*, which practically everyone uses when speaking Roumeika.

The group of Greek dialects we shall be referring to as Roumeika, comprises between three and five different local varieties, with differences at the phonological, morphological and lexical levels (Zouravliova, 1995). Older speakers are aware of such differences, and comment on them; at the same time, there is a high degree of mutual intelligibility. On the other hand, these dialects differ considerably from Standard Modern Greek. From a morphological and syntactic point of view they bear close similarities to Pontic Greek and to dialects of Northern Greece; however, their lexicon is heavily influenced by Turkish and Russian to the point of being incomprehensible to a Greek speaker with no knowledge of these languages. One should also point out that a number of archaic elements of Greek survive in this group of dialects –but not in Standard Greek. This makes many speakers claim with pride that 'their' Greek is closer to Ancient Greek, therefore 'purer' than Standard Modern Greek (At the same time, of course, most of them lament the 'mixed' character of their dialect).

3. Our research

3.1. The fieldwork

In the spring of 1996, the Centre for the Greek Language assigned the researcher with the task of collecting sociolinguistic data on the dialects' maintenance in the Marioupolis area. The first stage of our research in the area took place in the summer of the same year, when we spent four weeks in Marioupolis collecting data on language use and attitudes in four villages, which varied as to their distance from the city (between 10 and 65 klm) and to the percentage of Greek-origin inhabitants (between 66% and 90%). The sample population consisted of schoolchildren between the age of 9 and 17 in the four villages and the number of questionnaires which were finally used amounted to 78. Based on the subjects' answers concerning their language use, their attitudes towards their heritage and the minority language, and their social networks (cf. Hatzidaki, 1999) we concluded that minority language use was reportedly quite high in

one particular village, Maly Yanisol (now officially called Kriminiofka). As a result, during the second phase of our fieldwork, in July-August 1998, we focussed our attention on that village, which was selected as a case study for the whole area.

In the four weeks which we spent there, we observed language use patterns in various ways and among various categories of speakers and collected data through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. It proved to be difficult, however, to meet speakers of the younger generation and observe their natural speech habits to the extent we did with older speakers. As a result, we collected evidence on their speech patterns mainly through a written questionnaire which was administered to children and adolescents between 11 and 17 years in three different school grades in September 1998. These children had at least one parent of Greek descent, and the final number of returned questionnaires amounts to 54. Respondents were divided in two age-groups (11-13 and 14-17) which are, coincidentally, equally represented in the research sample.

3.2. The language proficiency and language use questionnaires

Here we shall present some of the results of the language proficiency and language use questionnaires, which, in our view, point to the direction of language shift.

With regard to *language proficiency* in Russian, Ukrainian and Roumeika, our speakers rated themselves as follows, on a scale from 0 to 3 (where 3 means '*perfect knowledge of the language*').

	Russian	*Ukrainian*	*Roumeika*
boys (n=26)	2.97	2.58	1.64
girls (n=25)	3.00	2.69	1.63
All subjects (n = 51)	2.98	2.63	1.63

Table 1

The difference between the languages is, in all cases, statistically significant (analysis of variance, F=0.000) and shows that children rate their knowledge of Greek as somewhere in the middle of the proficiency scale.

Table 2 presents the results of the investigation of frequency of language use of the dialect. Subjects were asked to report how often they use Russian and Roumeika with different categories of interlocutors. To this purpose we proposed to them a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 stands for '*always in Russian*', 2 for '*more often in Russian than in Roumeika*' and so on, and 5 = '*only in Roumeika*'.

In what language	*do you speak to*	*do(es) X speak to you?*
Your father	1.94	2,12
Your mother	1.80	1.96
Your brother(s)	1.73	1.69
Your sister(s)	1.55	1.57
Your grandfather	2.20	2.63
Your grandmother	2.42	2.73
Your uncles	1.68	1.92
Your aunts	1.57	1.84
Your cousins	1.54	1.54
Your friends	1.75	1.75
Your teachers	1.06	1.04
Civil servants	1.09	1.03

Table 2. Language use with various interlocutors (n=54).

If one looks at the frequency of language use of the dialect compared to the use of Russian, it is obvious that Russian is the dominant language of this age group. Roumeika is used mainly with grandparents and parents, if at all.

The situation is somewhat different in the parents' generation, where in many cases the answers reach 3 (= '*equally often in both languages'*) with the exception of children (younger generation) and civil servants, who may or may not be of Greek origin and are also associated with more formal domains.

3.3. The investigation of language attitudes among young speakers

3.3.1. Language atttitudes constitute one of the factors most often investigated in language shift/maintenance research (cf. Dorian, 1981; Gardner Chloros, 1981; Kuter, 1989; Röhr-Sendlmeier, 1990; Lyon, 1991; Lyon & Ellis, 1991; etc) as they constitute an important parameter which influences speakers' behaviour in minority settings. Just as positive attitudes –in conjunction with other factors– may lead group members to demand or/and to adopt a series of measures aiming at its retention, negative or conflicting attitudes may lead to general indifference as to the transmission of the minority language to the next generation, perhaps the single most salient step in reversing language shift (Fishman, 2001).

At the same time, the question of the nature, the definition, and the measurement of linguistic attitudes does not seem to be unanimously resolved by the scientific community. In our work, we have opted for a multi-dimensional view of attitudes, distinguishing between speakers' views towards their language as a code (language representations), towards its value as a means of communication, towards its use and its attempted maintenance or resurrection (cf. Giles, Hewstone & Ball, 1983).

The complex nature of attitudes –and, as a result, its multifaceted role in language maintenance– is illustrated by the results of a study conducted by the Fryske Akademy in Leeuwarden in the mid-eighties (Sikma, 1990). In 1986, the Fryske Akademy initiated the EMU-Project, which aimed to investigate the position of minority (regional and indigenous) languages in primary education in the various member states of the European Union. One of the issues investigated was the attitudes expressed by members of the minority language group towards their language and towards minority language education. From the data collected in the form of written reports, it became apparent that minority language speakers often have conflicting attitudes towards their language. According to Sikma (1990: 89) a distinction can be made between the emotional and the rational aspect, with the conflict between a positive and a negative attitude occurring in both aspects. At the emotional level, while speakers may feel at ease using a language which serves as a group identity marker, they may also experience a feeling of inferiority when comparing their language to other, more standard or prestigious linguistic codes. Apparently, some speakers express even shame when using their language. Such feelings of shame towards one's language in such circumstances have been documented elsewhere as well (e.g. Kuter, 1989; Chatzisavvidis, 1999; Hornberger & King, 2001; Lastra, 2001).

The same conflict appears when speakers reason about their language in a rational way. On the one hand, it is acknowledged as an important cultural aspect of the particular group; on the other, some speakers view it as having little practical value, as its limited domains of use do not help them secure a better place in the social ladder. Sikma (1990: 89) points out that those conflicting views and feelings are often expressed by the same speaker, who may choose to defend the minority language or to distance him/herself from it depending on the circumstances. He also observes that, according to their findings, the main conflict is between the emotional positive aspect and the rational negative one, in other words, between pride and low economic value (Sikma, 1990: 89-90).

A third point that he makes, and one which we feel is especially important in our case, has to do with the differences in attitudes observed between minority language groups. The research team made a distinction between (i) minority languages spoken in one state only, (ii) minority languages spoken in more than one states, and (iii) minority languages which are the majority language of a neighboring state. In the last case,

attitudes towards these languages are more favourable, as the rational negative aspect is absent. In other words, geographical proximity and status combined offer important advantages to the minority language speaker**.** In the particular case that we are investigating, speakers of Roumeika have Greece as their cultural and linguistic point of reference. Although the long distance between the two states can be overcome nowadays –either by airplane or a three-day coach ride– the linguistic distance between the two varieties of Greek cannot be so easily overcome. Greeks from the former Soviet Union, who arrive in Greece in search of a better future, soon find out that they cannot rely on their own varieties of Greek for unobstructed communication with the locals. The need to learn Modern Greek is pressing for all those who are willing to emigrate to Greece, Greek-origin and Ukrainians alike. As a result, there is keen interest for the learning of Modern Greek, as is evidenced by the number of students of this language in different types of schools. Over the last few years the Federation and the Greek authorities have been pressing for the introduction of Modern Greek as a second foreign language or as an optional subject in Ukrainian schools. The Ukrainian government, anxious to strenghten economic ties with countries of the West, has complied; as a result, in 1998-1999, Modern Greek was taught in more than sixty educational institutions in the Ukraine (mostly elementary and secondary schools) to more than 3,000 students[4]. At the same time, the Institute of Humanities (Faculty of Arts) in Marioupolis confers diplomas in Greek language and literature, thus preparing the Modern Greek teachers of tomorrow[5]. To put it briefly, Modern Greek is currently expanding in the Ukraine as a language which provides access to the European Union. Roumeika is, therefore, facing competition not only from two state languages (Ukrainian, which has been gaining ground after the country's independence, and Russian, which has been the prevailing code of communication in the south of the Ukraine so far) but also from a standard version of its own variety, the mastery of which promises economic opportunities, if not advantages. With all those factors at play, we wished to examine the state of affairs as far as attitudes toward the dialect are concerned, including the Modern Greek language as well.

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[4] According to data collected by local authorities for the Centre for the Study and Development of the Black Sea Greeks in Thessaloniki.

[5] It is worth mentioning that the teaching of Modern Greek is compulsory for students of any other field (Russian, Ukrainian, English, French, Economics, History).

3.3.2. The language attitudes questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised 20 views and subjects were asked to mark their agreement, disagreement, or lack of opinion with regard to that particular view. In case the subject's opinion was considered to express a negative view on the dialect, it was given a score of 1. In the opposite case, a score of 3 was given. All '*I neither agree nor disagree*' answers were scored with 2.

Among the 20 views in the questionnaire, two investigated the subjects' opinion on Standard Modern Greek, while the rest aimed at their own local variety of Greek (one of them, in fact, involved the dialect versus Modern Greek). Following Dorian (1981) to a certain extent, we classified the views proposed to subjects into six categories. The number in parentheses designates the order in which the particular item appears in the questionnaire.

Group A: views concerning the possible value the dialect may have:

(i) as a symbol of the particular culture

(1) Roumeika should be maintained, as it is part of the heritage of the Azov Greeks.

(15) Roumeika should be maintained, as otherwise our songs and stories will be lost with it.

(ii) as an identification marker with the ethnic group

(5) It is useful to be able to speak Roumeika because you can talk with someone without bystanders understanding you.

(9) Since we are Ukrainian subjects, we don't need to know any other language but Ukrainian and Russian.

(11) If you can't speak Roumeika, you cannot be considered a Roumeos.

(17) Whenever I speak Roumeika, I feel more strongly that I am part of this community.

(iii) its relation to education and prestige

(14) Speaking Roumeika shows that we are ignorant.

(iv) its practical value

(4) Roumeika has no practical usefulness.

(6) We do not need to know Roumeika, since there are so many other foreign languages to learn.

(v) any value it might have

(20) I cannot think of any good reason why Roumeika should continue to be used.

Group B: views concerning measures that speakers would like to be taken to support the dialect, plus a view which refers to the feasibility of the reversal effort:

(3) I would like Roumeika to be taught at school.
(7) I would like Roumeika to be used for administrative purposes.
(10) There should be (more) TV and radio programs in Roumeika.
(12) Trying to retain Roumeika is not realistic.

The rest of the items can be categorised as follows.

Views (13) and (18) investigate the subjects' opinions on bilingualism and the dialect's value as a communicative and educational asset:

(13) Acquiring a second language at home broadens your horizons.
(18) I would like Roumeika to continue to be used because I enjoy talking in more than one languages.

View (16) asks the subject to choose between the two varieties of Greek for inclusion into the school curriculum:

(16) If I had to choose between Modern Greek and Roumeika to be taught at school, I would prefer Roumeika.

View (2) investigates the issue of the subjects' representation of their language, especially its presumed 'difficulty':

(2) Roumeika is a hard language to learn.

Finally, we presented subjects with two views which aimed at capturing their representations of the Modern Greek language and their wish to receive instruction in this language.

(8) I would like Modern Greek to be taught at school.
(19) Roumeika is quite different from Modern Greek.

The statistical analysis which followed did not take into consideration the answers to the two last views (since the analysis was based on how 'pro-dialect' an answer was) nor the answer to view (1), to which we had a 100% agreement. The reliability control of our scale yielded satisfactory results (alpha = 0.77). At the same time, the various views which were considered part of Group A and Group B were found to have high correlation coefficients (in Group A, eight out of nine views have correlation coefficients between 0,500 and 0,639, while in Group B, all have correlation coefficients between 0,602 and 0,782). Therefore, we can safely assume that their inclusion in the same group is valid.

4. Discussion of results

Our questionnaire aimed at capturing the different kinds of value attached to the dialect by the younger generation of speakers and the varying degrees of such an attachment. In many cases, a whole picture can emerge only with a combined reference to speakers' reactions to other items of the questionnaire. Therefore, we shall proceed to the discussion of reactions to views in Group A, moving to a discussion of the views in Group B, while making reference to some of the other items as well.

4.1.1. From the speakers' reactions to views (1) and (15) the dialect emerges as the undisputable *cultural and historical symbol of the community*:

> *(1) Roumeika should be maintained, as it is part of the heritage of the Azov Greeks.*
> (I agree = 100%)
> *(15) Roumeika should be maintained, as otherwise our songs and stories will be lost with it.*
> (I agree = 92.6%, I neither agree nor disagree = 7.4%, I disagree = 0%)

Percentages of agreement as to the role of the dialect as *an identification marker* with the ethnic group are almost as high [views (5), (9), (11), (17)]. Among these views, the most 'lukewarm' reaction is found concerning the view of the 'exclusive' function of the dialect:

> *(5) It is useful to be able to speak Roumeika because you can talk with someone without bystanders understanding you.*
> (I agree = 57.4%, I neither agree nor disagree = 14.8%, I disagree = 27.8%)

The subjects' reactions to the next three views are quite interesting. Consider view (9):

> *(9) Since we are Ukrainian subjects, we don't need to know any other language but Ukrainian and Russian.*
> (I agree = 13%, I neither agree nor disagree = 5.6%, I disagree = 81.5%)

Disagreeing to such a large extent shows, in our view, that young members of the community do not consider it their duty as Ukrainian citizens to abandon the language of their ethnic group. The language maintenance rate which their community has achieved throughout the last decades in adverse circumstances may have proven influential here.

The next two views refer to the potential function of the dialect as a *bond with the ethnic group*. With regard to view (17), a large part of the young speakers of our

sample claim that using the dialect enhances their feeling of belonging to the particular community:

> *(17) Whenever I speak Roumeika, I feel more strongly that I am part of this community.*
> (I agree = 71.7%, I neither agree nor disagree = 17.1%, I disagree = 11.3%).

On the other hand, a similar percentage disagree that speaking the dialect is a necessary condition for ethnic group membership:

> *(11) If you can't speak Roumeika, you cannot be considered a Roumeos.*
> (I agree = 16.7%, I neither agree nor disagree = 13%, I disagree = 70.4%)

It seems that, although the dialect retains its character as a distinctive ethnicity marker, at the same time the majority of young community members claim their right to ethnic group membership without connecting it to the use of the dialect. At this point, it is worth noticing that adults over thirty also disagree with this view (64.3%) argueing, for instance, that "*my son does not speak Roumeika but he is Roumeos nevertheless*").

View (14) aimed at investigating whether speakers look down on their dialect as its speakers are mainly peasants and industrial workers:

> *(14) Speaking Roumeika shows that we are ignorant.*
> (I agree = 5.6%, I neither agree nor disagree = 14.8%, I disagree = 79.6%)

Four out of five young speakers do not agree with this view. It is also indicative of the general attitudes held by community members that *all the adults* who answered this questionnaire disagreed with this view. The situation here differs from what obtains in other minority language situations when a language lacks prestigious domains of use. We believe that this is attributable to the speakers' representations of the dialect as having a direct link with Ancient Greek (cf. section 2). This specific variety of Greek enjoys an enormous prestige among large groups of Greek speakers and, apparently, the Ukrainian Greeks also adopt this stance.

Taking a *utilitarian perspective* of the dialect, the speakers' attitudes were investigated through reactions to the following two views:

> *(4) Roumeika has no practical usefulness.*
> (I agree = 11.3%, I neither agree nor disagree = 28.3%, I disagree = 60.4%)

It should be pointed out that 13 out of 14 adults who were asked their opinion on this view disagreed and the other did not answer. The picture is different here; although 60.4% of the subjects disagree with this view, an impressive 28.3% express their

ambivalence as to how useful the dialect is. We consider this finding consistent with the younger speakers' limited use of the dialect.

A related view contrasts the dialect with other languages with regard to the importance of multilingualism:

> *(6) We do not need to know Roumeika, since there are so many other foreign languages to learn.*
> (I agree = 5.7%, I neither agree nor disagree = 17%, I disagree = 77.4%)

A large majority disagrees with this view. However, one could claim that the result *per se* does not show that the dialect is considered more useful than other languages; the dialect serves a social(izing) and an identificatory function, unlike any foreign language (cf. Fishman, 2001: 5).

In this connection, we see that speakers acknowledge the dialect's value as a cultural and communicative asset:

> *(13) Acquiring a second language at home broadens your horizons.*
> (I agree = 84.6%, I neither agree nor disagree = 13.5%, I disagree = 1.9%)
> *(18) I would like Roumeika to continue to be used because I enjoy talking in more than one languages.*
> (I agree = 83.3%, I neither agree nor disagree = 14.8%, I disagree = 1.9%)

The last item in Group A was deliberately formulated in a vague manner:

> *(20) I cannot think of any good reason why Roumeika should continue to be used.*
> (I agree = 7.4%, I neither agree nor disagree = 9.3%, I disagree = 83.3%)

The overwhelming majority of speakers express their disagreement; as it has become obvious from the preceding answers, the dialect continues to serve some important functions for the community.

4.1.2. The items which were part of Group B were views concerning measures that would raise the status and expand the functions of the dialect [views (3), (7), (10)] plus a view on the feasibility of the reversal effort [view (12)].

> *(7) I would like Roumeika to be used for administrative purposes.*
> (I agree = 24.5%, I neither agree nor disagree = 58.5%, I disagree = 17%)

The possibility of such a development seems puzzling to many respondents. Could Roumeika be elevated to the status of a language worthy and capable of handling administrative matters? Should it be so and why? The answers seem to indicate that the

demand for such a role is not yet rife among community members, at least of this age group.

(10) There should be (more) TV and radio programs in Roumeika.
(I agree = 38.9%, I neither agree nor disagree = 25.9%, I disagree = 35.2%)

Again, we notice that more than 60% of the speakers do not consider it a matter of importance to hear Roumeika on TV and radio programs. At the time of the research, there was only one radio programme broadcasted from Marioupolis once a week, in which some traditional songs could be heard along with songs in Modern Greek. The language of the programme was otherwise Russian. According to our information, however, it is doubtful that even few of the responders knew of the programme and listened to it.

(3) I would like Roumeika to be taught at school.
(I agree= 85.2%, I neither agree nor disagree = 7.4, I disagree = 7.4%)

A very large majority express the wish to be taught Roumeika at school. This could be interpreted as a sign that young speakers would welcome the teaching of a standard form of the language. However, at this point it is useful to see what speakers feel about the possibility of being taught *the Modern Greek language* at school.

(8) I would like Modern Greek to be taught at school.
(I agree = 92.6%, I neither agree nor disagree = 5.6%, I disagree = 1.9%)

The majority this time is overwhelming. In order to investigate whether young speakers have a clear preference of one code over the other, we placed them in the following dilemma:

(16) If I had to choose between Modern Greek and Roumeika to be taught at school, I would prefer Roumeika.
(I agree = 41.5%, I neither agree nor disagree = 28.3%, I disagree = 30.2%)

The distribution of answers, in our view, points to the direction of divided loyalties. On the one hand, the 'local' Greek variety, symbol of their heritage; on the other, a standard and prestigious code which allows easier access to a Western country, a world of goods and 'high life' by Ukrainian standards. Taking aside those who proclaim themselves in favour of the dialect (41.5%), the balance seems to tip up in favour of Modern Greek.

(12) Trying to retain Roumeika is not realistic.
(I agree = 11.1%, I neither agree nor disagree = 29.6%, I disagree = 59.3%)

The answer to this question indicates the speakers' subjective view of the dialect's chances for survival and should be seen against the background of actual practices. Viewed in this light, it is more wishful thinking than a conscious expression of commitment on the dialect's behalf.

4.2. Summarizing, one may say that the dialect continues to have important identificatory functions; it keeps the tradition alive and group members together. However, its importance as a defining, sine-qua-non feature of identity is disputable. Equally disputable is its practical value, although not its value as a cultural asset.

The general picture that emerges is somewhat different to the situation described, for instance, in the EMU-Project study. It is true that there is a discrepancy between appreciation to the dialect expressed by its –unwilling– young speakers for *sentimental* reasons and the extent to which they think it has some *practical usefulness*. However, they are far from contemptuous towards it. With this in mind, we may say that the dialect is in a better position than other minority languages as far as attitudes towards it are concerned. Does this mean that there is hope for its future? On the contrary, our research shows that both frequency of language use and degree of mastery of the dialect are on the decline from one generation to the next. With the exception of an unexpectedly high prestige attached to the dialect –because of its association with a revered form of the language– the situation is typical of so many other cases of language shift. On the one hand, speakers treat the endangered language as something dear which they are in no haste to part with. On the other, they are unwilling to make any particular effort to ensure its maintenance by committing to its frequent use and intergenerational transmission. Positive attitudes alone are not sufficient to halt the conversion of a thriving instrument of communication into a symbol of history and ethnic group membership.

To make matters worse, the spread of the teaching of Modern Greek in local schools may pose another threat to the dialect, instead of reanimating it. Children exposed to a standard variety different from their own, invested with the status of the norm and the prestige of the official language of the Greek state, may come to appreciate their own variety even less than they do now. We are facing an interesting situation, in which a 'weak' language within the European Union plays a hegemonizing role in a different context, far from its borders, towards its even weaker local variety.

Further research is needed in order to reveal the potential harm or benefit for the dialect that will come out of the dynamic presence of Modern Greek in the educational system of the Ukraine.

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