

## WHEN A LANGUAGE BECOMES *OLD* THE CASE OF CALABRIAN GREEK.

*I glossa zi plateggiunda*

Језици, као и сваки свакодневни предмети, старе и постају застарели ако се не мењају и прилагођавају тако да одражавају потребе савременог живота. Овај процес се јавља у многим језички хетерогеним друштвима када старије генерације, често намерно, одлуче да не говоре својим језиком зарад доминантног језика. Постоји много могућих узрока за ову појаву, али и само један главни исход: језик постаје стар и бескористан за млађе генерације. У овом чланку ћу се бавити калабријским грчким и начином на који постаје „застарели“ језик, што је на крају довело до напуштања овог језика. Посебно ћу се бавити питањем погрешне ревитализације и фолклоризације овог језика.

**Кључне речи:** угрожени језици, фолклоризација, ревитализација.

### 1. Introduction

The Greek of Calabria, Greko, is listed in the Red Book of UNESCO as one of the most endangered languages in Europe. The language's sharpest decline started at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, by the 1950s, the older generations had deliberately stopped the intergenerational transmission of Greko. As reported by the International Association for the Defence of Threatened Languages and Culture in 1975, the Greek language and culture in Calabria was already under severe threat of complete disappearance:

The way in which the Greek minority of Calabria is considered and treated constitutes on the moral level:

- a grave attack on the natural rights of man as an individual or a social being on the level of rights:

- a violation of the principles and dispositions clearly announced by the Italian constitutions [...].

The commission is convinced – and with it all its members – that it is necessary to take urgent measures to avoid the extinction of the Greek culture in Calabria. [...]

To leave things as they are would be – for all those who have the possibility and are obliged to avoid the worsening – to take the weight of a total destruction of the culture. (AIDLCM 1975: 167-8)

Since the late 1960s, many activities have been implemented towards the revitalization of the Greko language and culture. However, the results of these programmes were not reflected in the number of speakers, which instead declined sharply. What caused this serious discrepancy between the number of educational and cultural programmes and the number of speakers? Why was the revitalization of Greko not effective?

In this paper, I investigate the process of *mis-revitalisation* which ultimately brought about the folklorization of Greko. The paper is divided into three sections. Section 2 briefly addresses the question of the origins of the Greek language in Calabria. Section 3 focuses on the revitalization programmes put in place from the late 1960s onwards and examines the results of such activities. Section 4 presents the conclusions.

### *1.1 Some general information*

According to art. 2 of the law n. 482/1999, the Greek communities in Italy are recognized and safeguarded by the Italian government as one of the twelve linguistic and cultural minorities of Italy. There are two regions in the south of Italy where an ancient Greek variety has survived, Puglia and Calabria. In Puglia, Griko, as the language is called there, is spoken in

the southern area of Salento and in particular in the villages of Calimera, Martignano, Martano, Sternatia, Zollino, Corigliano d'Otranto, Soletto, Melpignano and Castrignano dei Greci. In Calabria, Greko is spoken in a small number of villages located in the province of Reggio Calabria (southern Calabria), namely Bova, Bova Marina, Condofuri, Galliciano, Rochudi Nuovo and Reggio Calabria.

Griko and Greko are often considered one language, although they are in fact rather different. The two communities have never established relations, their language and culture developing independently from each other. Even the origin of the two languages might be different, the Greek of Calabria being more ancient than the Greek of Puglia, as suggested by a number of studies (Fanciullo 1996; see also Bonfante 1964; Franceschi 1973). Today, both varieties are on the verge of disappearance, although Griko in Puglia seems to have been better preserved in comparison with Greko. In this paper, I will only focus on Calabrian Greek.

## **2. The disputed origins of Greko**

The question of the origins of the Greek language in southern Italy was at the heart of the linguistic research in this area during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Three main hypotheses have been proposed: i) the continuity hypothesis, ii) the Byzantine hypothesis, and iii) the 'revised' continuity hypothesis. Before discussing them, a brief historical digression is required.

As documented by numerous inscriptions, Greek arrived in southern Italy in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC, when the first Greek colonies were established in the region. The south of Italy, Magna Graecia, was a prosperous cultural area, home to many Greek personalities such as Archimedes, Pythagoras, Zaleucus, Parmenides, Gorgias, and Empedocles. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC when the Roman Empire began to conquer the region, Latin became the language of governors and officials. In the 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD, the Western Roman Empire fell; however the south of Italy became part of the Eastern Roman Empire. As a consequence, from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD until the Norman conquest in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, Calabria was under Byzantine rule and Greek became the most widely spoken language in this area once again (Minuto 2005).

Following the historical trajectory of the region, Rohlf (1972, 1974, 1979) claimed that Greek in southern Italy has been spoken uninterruptedly since the *Magna Graecia* period. He examined the most ancient traits of this language which confirmed its ancient origins. Accordingly, the Roman Empire did not leave traces of a Latinization on the region, which was instead 'Romanized' only after the Norman conquest. By contrast, the second hypothesis traces the origin of *Greko* and *Grikoon* to Byzantine Greek. Following Battisti (1927; see also Falcone 1973), one of the major advocates of the Byzantine hypothesis, the Ancient Greek dialects were lost during Roman rule in favour of Latin. Subsequently, when southern Italy became part of the Byzantine Empire, flows of migrants arrived to the coasts of southern Italy bringing Greek again to this area. As a result, the language that is spoken today in Calabria and Puglia is a descendant of Byzantine Greek.

More recently, a third hypothesis has been put forward by Fanciullo (1996; cf. also Ribezzo 1930; Mosino 1988). Although mostly confirming Rohlf's theory, Fanciullo takes a less radical approach on the absence of a Latinization in southern Italy before the Normans. In fact, he confirms the continuity of Greek (at least for Calabria), but he also maintains that during the Roman and the Byzantine Empires both Greek and Latin/Romance were spoken in this area, in a situation of bilingualism. Note also that Fanciullo (1996: 74-7), contrary to Rohlf, mostly refers to Calabria which, as also acknowledged by many Byzantinists (Bonfante 1964; Franceschi 1973) seems to have preserved a more ancient variety of Greek in comparison with Puglia.

In relation to Calabria therefore, there is sufficient evidence to maintain the continuity hypothesis, as, according to Fanciullo (1996: 77), the opposite would be difficult to prove. In his analysis on the origins of *Greko*, Fanciullo (1996: 49-92) places great attention on the situation of bilingualism (or even multilingualism) which characterized the area during both the Roman and the Byzantine Empire. This condition emerges from the documents of those centuries, as well as from the anthroponyms and toponyms of the region. He also acknowledges the ancient traits of the Greek language in Calabria already analyzed by Rohlf (1972, 1974, 1979; cf. also Caratzas 1958; Tsopanakis 1981), and highlights the

number of fragments of Greek inscriptions from the Roman period found in southern Calabria.

To Fanciullo's analysis, two more arguments need to be added. The first is a Greek inscription dated 4<sup>th</sup> AD, found in Reggio Calabria: [ΤΩΝΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ] 'of the Jews' (Ferrua, 1950). This inscription, which most probably stood at the entrance to a Jewish place of worship, clearly suggests that there was a Greek-speaking population in Reggio Calabria. Otherwise, it would be hard to explain why Jews living in the Roman Empire would display a sign in Greek. The second argument against the hypothesis of a migration of Byzantines to Calabria seems to come from genetics. Very recent genetic studies (Petrilli, unpublished data) have shown that the people inhabiting southern Calabria are most probably an indigenous population which has always inhabited this region. Their genetic asset presents many common traits with other Mediterranean and Balkan populations, Greeks included, but it appears so far unique within the southern Italian and the Balkan landscape. However, this research is currently being undertaken, therefore the results are to be considered preliminary.

### **3. The loss and the revitalization of Greko**

From the end of the Byzantine period, the Greek-speaking area has been in constant decline. However, Greek was still the main language used in the churches and monasteries of southern Calabria, therefore maintaining a status of prestige.

A turning point is 1572, when the Latin rite was established in the diocese in Bova. This event had two consequences. First Greko was no longer associated with the prestige language used by the clergy, second it became an oral language since the church was the main point of textual production. The last document written in Greko using the Greek alphabet is dated 1572 and it is the anathema written by Colucci Garino, priest of Bova, against the bishop Giulio Stavriano, who managed to establish the Latin rite (Longo 1988).

Besides this event, the most abrupt and sharpest decrease of speakers occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. As Spanòhigh says:

*It is only after 1921 that the Greek Calabria has been limited to the present boundaries which are 223 sq. km [...] until the past century [19<sup>th</sup>] the whole Jonic side of the Aspromonte until the torrent of Butramo was inhabited by Greek-speaking and bilingual communities. (Spanò 1965: 145-7 – Translation mine)*

At the time, the idea that ‘We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians’ was prevailing in the young Italian state, thus causing a heavy Italianization of the peninsula. Regional dialects were considered backward, and the people who spoke them were marginalized. This negative attitude was fostered in particular under Fascism when the *need to be a true Italian* became a crucial component of the Fascist ideology. People were ashamed of speaking a *useless* dialect, of belonging to a culture that was not *the great Italian culture* (Mosino 1989, 1997; Katsoyannou 1995). This sentiment of inferiority worked on the population’s subconscious for many decades, almost leading to the disappearance of the Greek identity and language.

Additionally, in the 1950s economic factors played an important role in the ultimate abandonment of Greko. Indeed, the disastrous economic conditions of southern Italy and the extremely limited resources of Calabria in particular, forced thousands of people to emigrate to the north of the country (cf. Stamuli 2008). The integration in the northern regions, however, was extremely difficult for southern emigrants. To mention one example, the *classi differenziali* ‘special classes’, were established in 1928 for children with disabilities or learning difficulties ([www.gazzattaufficiale.it](http://www.gazzattaufficiale.it)). These classes were also used for the children of emigrants from the south of Italy, as they were considered to have learning difficulties due to their ‘different’ language, and to have problems of integration due to cultural clashes (cf. Dini 1966). This strong discrimination contributed heavily to the loss of the language.

In addition to this negative attitude, a strong phobia against bilingualism spread in those decades. As noticed by Squillaci (2003: 14-24),

people were afraid of speaking two languages to their children, as this would prevent them from speaking correctly in any of the languages. This sentiment was deeply rooted in people's beliefs who therefore prioritized the dominant language over the dialect, given that it would allow their children to have a better future. In the collective imagination, Greko was the language of shepherds and peasants, a perception which would come to pose a limit to the integration of the younger generations of the Greek-speaking community in the new Italian society. Greko would not have opened up any possibilities for young people to study or work in richer regions of Italy; by contrast, Italian was associated with education, progress and the future (Squillaci 2003):

*'Egò ìthela ta pedìa mu na ene vvucati,  
jatru di...Ce to Grekoti to thèlu?'*  
*I wanted my kids to be lawyers,  
doctors..what do they need Greek for?*  
(R.Nucera, Galliciano, 07-01-2016 –  
Grekolanguage – Translation mine)

As a result, the older generations started abandoning the language in favour of the local Romance dialect or, albeit rarely, Italian. People who spoke Greko were called *paddeki* 'idiots', and found themselves marginalized and their children punished in schools if they spoke this language publicly (cf. Martino 1980, Mosino 1989, Stamuli 2008).

This situation is summarized in the 1975 report of the commission of the International Association for the Defence of Threatened Languages and Culture after their visit to the Hellenophone area of Calabria.

*These countrymen, these Greek shepherds are living the last humiliations of seeing themselves deprived of their personal identity and all that makes them feel men. [...] the facts are there to see clearly, the Greek community in Calabria constitutes an economic and*

*cultural island in a region which is itself underdeveloped, a second grade colonization.* (AIDLCM 1975:167-8)

However, by the late 1960s, the negative attitude towards Greko had started to change thanks to the activism of two local teachers in particular, Domenico Minuto and Franco Mosino. The two teachers started a series of weekly visits to the Greek-speaking villages, in order to campaign for the revival of the language. In 1968, together with help of young students, Minuto and Mosino founded the first Hellenophone association 'La Jonica'. The association founded a branch in every village of the Greek-speaking area in order to promote the importance of the Greko language (Campolo 2002). Moreover, the revitalization of the language generated a growing attention within the community to the world described by this language: the local culture, artefacts, music, dances, and traditions of Greek Calabria. The reaction from young people was extremely positive and brought a sudden growth of small groups dedicated to the rediscovery and re-evaluation of Greko, which turned the former negative perception on its head. It transformed the prevailing view which regarded the language as an obstacle to social progress into one in which the language was seen as an exceptional opportunity for both a cultural awakening and economic growth of the area.

From the late 1970s, the local branches of 'La Jonica' started becoming autonomous, giving rise to an ever-increasing number of cultural and musical associations. Moreover, the Hellenophone area established ties with Greece which brought about a continuous exchange between the Hellenophone area and the Hellenic motherland (Casile and Fiorenza 1993, Campolo 2002). For many years, the Greek government as well as many Greek foundations and associations have financed study trips, cultural excursions, summer programmes, and scholarships to study Modern Greek, specifically for the Greeks of Calabria. Additionally, from 1994 to 2011, the Greek government financed a programme for teaching Modern Greek in the schools and in cultural associations of the Hellenophone area (Campolo 2002). As a result of all the above, the number of Greek tourists, scholars and personalities visiting the area increased.



### 3.1 *The final stage of Greko*

In the last 50 years, many programmes have been implemented to aid the revival of Greko. Language courses have been organized by associations in addition to the teaching of standard Modern Greek in schools by Greek teachers. All these activities shed a new light on Greko, built contacts with Greece, revitalized interest and ties with the language, and led to the revival of the Greek-speaking area.

To date, hundreds of programmes and conferences have taken place in the area funded by the Greek government and foundations, by the region of Calabria and by EU funds. Within the five Greek-speaking villages, there are more than fifteen cultural associations which have been founded with the aim of safeguarding and promoting the language. Dozens of books, grammars, and dictionaries have been published to document Greko and to transmit it to new speakers. Furthermore, since 2004 in each Greek-speaking village, there is a ‘linguistic desk’ which is intended to be run by Greko speakers to give information regarding Greko or to help Greko speakers with Italian bureaucracy (cf. Stamuli 2008).

Nevertheless, over the past 50 years, despite many cultural initiatives being undertaken, the number of Greko speakers has decreased dramatically. Yet, it is difficult to provide a precise number of speakers. The last official census was carried out in 1921 and counted 3639 speakers (Spanò 1965: 153). Since then, the numbers are only estimations. The last reliable source is Katsoyannou (1995), who in 1995 estimated that there were 500 speakers. Today, 21 years on, it is estimated that 300-350 circa speakers remain. Nonetheless, the youngest speakers are in their 60s (with few exceptions), proving that a new generation of speakers has not been formed. Indeed, the number of speakers has not increased even by a single unit, thereby confirming the death of the language. Greko has survived in songs and poems but it is used only occasionally by old speakers in front of researchers and tourists, as an exhibition of folklore.

Considering the lack of new speakers of Greko, can we still talk about revitalization of the language? What can be achieved through the ongoing programmes for the safeguarding and revitalization of Greko?

### 3.2 Causes and consequences of the loss of Greko

A crucial distinction is required between the causes which led to the abandonment of Greko as a language used for communication purposes, and the causes which led to its folklorization. I shall start by examining the former, and in the next section I will examine the latter.

The reasons for the loss of Greko are various and complex. However, there are two factors which I consider to be the root causes for the abandonment of the language, which are public shame in speaking Greko and poverty in the Greek-speaking area, as mentioned in the previous sections.

As Giovanni Andrea Crupi wrote in Greko in 1981, *emìmmaste to mesimèri to mesimeriu* – ‘we are the south of the southern-most part of Italy’. In saying this, he referred to the disastrous economic conditions of southern Calabria, the poorest region of Italy and, according to the recent statistics, one of the poorest in Europe (Istat 2015, Eurostat 2015). Because of Calabria’s limited resources, people were, and still are, forced to emigrate northwards. The Hellenophone area did not offer any prospects for young people who wanted to remain and work there, nor did Greko. Speaking Greko was not an advantage in securing employment, rather it was seen as *useless* and *not functional* for people who instead had to guarantee a future for their children.

In this respect, the role played by the Italian state in the revitalization strategies of Greko was inefficient. In contrast to the policies implemented for other minority languages, in the Hellenophone area, the state has never subsidized the revival of Greko through effective measures like reserving jobs for Greko speakers, concrete opportunities for young people to remain in the Hellenophone area, subsidies for people who used the language in the workplace, and other similar strategies. Instead, in other regions of Italy, like Trentino Alto Adige and Val d’Aosta, many laws were issued to incentivize the usage of the minority language. For instance, since 1961 civil servants working in public offices in the province of Bolzano (Trentino Alto Adige) must speak the minority language and, according to their proficiency, receive a ‘bilingualism allowance’ which nowadays ranges from € 136.85 to € 227.91 per month ([www.gazzettaufficiale.it](http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it)). Furthermore, people working in public offices prior to the passage of the law who did not speak the

language, received 70% of the monthly allowance if they took a language course. Unlike public officials, public school teachers are not obliged to speak the minority language, but if they do, they are eligible for a bilingualism allowance up to € 2821.14 per year ([www.provincia.bz.it](http://www.provincia.bz.it)).

All these measures have inevitably led to a huge increase in speakers of the minority language in Trentino Alto Adige, as well as in Val d'Aosta. They have created jobs, institutions for the learning of the minority language, and a system of official examinations which have to be taken in order to achieve a language certificate and, thus, the bilingualism allowance. Furthermore, what is more important, they have incentivized people to remain in their region. By contrast, in Calabria, none of these measures has ever been taken. The linguistic desk, which was opened only in 2004, was the first job specifically reserved to Greko speakers (from 10 to 15 positions max.). Nevertheless, the results of this project have thus far not been successful. As a consequence, the difficult economic conditions of the area convinced thousands of people to abandon their land and their language. For the majority of those who remained, Greko became a folklorized language. Even the oldest speakers of Greko who acquired it as mother tongue, when asked to speak Greko, more frequently switch to the local Romance dialect, and insert many Romance words into their speech, proving that, after many years of Italianization, they have lost significant competence in the language.

#### 4. Folklorisation

In this last section, I focus on the factors which led to the *mis-revitalization* of the language. By mis-revitalization I define here a process which has contributed to the increase of developmental projects, of attention on the Greko language, and of associated cultural activities, but has not brought about an actual increase of speakers: a revitalization of the area rather than of the language. This mis-revitalization inevitably resulted in the folklorization of Greko which became the language used in official salutations in public ceremonies, in road signs, in titles of projects and programmes regarding any aspect of the Greek-speaking area, and in story-telling for researchers and tourists.

Since the seminal work of Fishman (1987), the concept of language folklorization has been addressed in many studies. However, no one has ever analysed this phenomenon in relation to Greko. Over the years, the gap between public manifestations of language use (e.g. road signs, salutations) and the actual use of Greko in everyday life has grown ever wider. Greko has lost its communicative value, therefore becoming a folklorized language, produced only for external consumption (cf. Tosco 2011). I have identified three main causes for such a result, i. the lack of intergenerational continuity, ii. the ineffectiveness of programmes purportedly aimed at revitalization, iii. Italy vs Greece: prestige.

The lack of intergenerational continuity has been by far the biggest obstacle to revitalization. As Fishman says, '[t]he road to societal death is paved by language activity that is not focused on intergenerational continuity i.e. that is diverted into efforts that do not involve and influence the socialization behaviours of families of child-bearing age' (1991: 91). In the Hellenophone area, the older generations hardly changed their negative attitude towards the language for the reasons given above (stigmas, phobia of bilingualism, economic factors). Even the people who were supporters of the activities put in place by the cultural associations and actively promoted the language would not speak Greko to their children.

*A me patri nci piaciva, si! Iddu lu grecu  
lu parrava bbonu, sempri lu chiama-  
vanu mi parra grecu. E poi cantava in  
grecu... nci piaciva assai. [...] no ma eu  
no.. cusì, carchi parola, ma non sacciu  
atru, non è chi lu parravamu a la casa.  
My dad really liked it [Greko]. He spoke  
very well Greko, people always used to  
ask him to talk in Greko. He also sang in  
Greko... he really liked it. [...] no, but I  
don't... I know some words but nothing  
else... we didn't speak Greko at home.  
(Giuseppe Maesano, 12.09.2015, Bova  
– local Romance language – Transla-  
tion mine)*

Giuseppe Maesano is the son of Angelo Maesano (Mastrangelo), one of the biggest advocates of Greko. His father was a prominent figure within the Greek community, a poet and composer, author of ‘Ela ela mu kondà’, the most famous Greko song. Nonetheless, Mastrangelo Maesano rarely spoke Greko to his own children. In fact, it was deeply rooted in people’s minds that the children would have had learning difficulties if they had heard the two languages simultaneously, and thus it was better to teach them Italian as they would have better opportunities (cf. Squillaci 2003, 2005). Similarly, the younger generations who learnt Greko in the 1970s and actively contributed to its revitalization, never transmitted the language to their children. Hence, they would speak Greko in public, which was already a big success of the movement, but they would not speak Greko at home.

The second factor is found again in the description of societal death by Fishman ‘song concerts, theatrical performances, poetry readings, lectures, publications and prizes are RLS means, not RLS ends in themselves’ (1991: 91). Crucially, in the area under consideration, the programmes undertaken became the end rather than the means to achieve the revival of the language. As a result, many associations were founded solely for the establishment of a programme, and then closed down once a programme ended. The use of Greko was often capitalized on in order to finance projects aimed at the development of tourism and other activities, rather than the actual learning and promotion of the language. Therefore, the majority of these programmes were ineffective in enhancing the vitality of the language.

The third reason is linked to prestige, what I call the ‘Italy vs Greece factor’. For younger generations, Greece has never represented a country to which they would emigrate. Being associated with Greece would not open up more opportunities than Italy could already offer. On the contrary, young people were attracted by the north of Italy, and nowadays, by the north of Europe. Consequently, they favoured the learning of Italian or English over Greko. As already mentioned, the absence of economic opportunities in Calabria was at the root of this reasoning.

## 5. Conclusions

In recent decades, the revitalization strategies aimed at Greko have missed the opportunity to foster deeper awareness of the importance of

the Greko language as a crucial element of the community's identity. Furthermore, the absence of effective strategies implemented by the Italian state towards the revitalization process initiated by local people in the 1960s has greatly contributed to the dramatic reduction of speakers.

As a result, despite the initial genuine enthusiasm of the activists in the 1960s and 1970s, the short-term programmes became a tool for crystallizing the status quo of the language, producing a number of lively cultural and touristic activities which capitalized on the 'glorious Greek roots' of the land without affecting people's attitude towards the reality of the language. Whilst the language could have been used as an instrument to connect the area's Greek history with contemporary everyday life, the use of Greko has been abandoned in favour of connecting with an Italian identity that is forward-looking, and has no space for a language stigmatised once again as *old*. This social constellation favoured the folklorization of Greko which nowadays survives in songs and poems. Very few people speak this language when meeting each other, and only one young family still uses Greko on an everyday basis.

As Yamamoto, Brenzinger and Villalón claim (2008: 68), 'minority languages will only stay vital if communities develop meaningful roles for their languages in their everyday lives and find good reasons to speak and transmit them to their children'. In the case of Greko, the majority of the community members did not find valuable reasons to keep the language alive. This language which has a stunning richness in the lexis concerning the pastoral world, for instance it has got 9 different words to name different types of fig (e.g.. *affàci*, *apochìdi*, *klostò*), and more than 15 words to describe the colours of a goat (ex. *rusocèfalo*, *kasbopò*, *rusokàpulo*), still has not got a word for fridge, television, radio. When these objects entered people's everyday life, the speakers had already decided that the language was too old to be spoken by their children and therefore they did not *upgrade* Greko for the modern society. The only valuable reason that still pushes very few people to speak Greko is a deep love for this language and its culture.

However, looking at the situation of the Hellenophone area from another perspective, it must be acknowledged that many changes have occurred since the 1950s. Indeed, the 'failed' revival of the language has exerted a

positive influence on the local culture, tradition, and music, which were re-evaluated as pivotal elements of the identity of the Hellenophone area. In comparison with the past decades, the population is no longer ashamed of claiming its Greek cultural uniqueness. Indeed, the acknowledgement of the Greek roots of the territory has been for the first time valued, bringing about the awareness of the multiple identities of this area. This *mis-revitalization* has broken the stigmas against the Greek-speaking community and has drawn national and international attention to the stories of a people once marginalized, and an area once neglected.

Greko was the tip of an iceberg, which brought to the surface a whole world of music, dances and traditions which were hidden and forgotten, it has been the trigger for the revival of the culture of the Hellenophone area. However, once it had brought to the surface the rest of the iceberg, only few people still remembered the language.

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### **Abstract**

Languages, like any everyday object, become *old*, obsolete, if they are not updated to reflect the necessities of modern life. This process occurs in many linguistically heterogeneous societies when the older generations, often deliberately, decide not to speak their own language anymore in order to adopt the dominant one. This has many possible causes, but only one major outcome: the language becomes *old* and *useless* to the younger generations. In this article, I will discuss the passing into 'obsolescence' of Calabrian Greek, which ultimately brought about the abandonment of the language. In particular, I will explore the issue of the *mis-revitalization* and the subsequent *folklorization* of this language.

**Keywords:** endangered languages, folklorization, revitalization.

### **Biographical statement**

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