



## Vlach-language theatre: The role of supertitles as translation in endangered-language heritage performance

Christina Papagiannouli  
University of South Wales, UK  
[christina.papagiannouli@southwales.ac.uk](mailto:christina.papagiannouli@southwales.ac.uk)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6686-3181>

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### Abstract:

During the spring and summer of 2023, I visited my hometown Veria to undertake preliminary research on endangered-language heritage performance with funding from the Welsh Government's Taith programme. During my visit, I worked closely with the Folklore Association of Vlachs of Veria, observed their work, and participated in their heritage performance, learning not only about the communities' cultural heritage but also about my own personal heritage. Based on empirical research, observations, personal experience and practice research, this paper focuses on the use of supertitles and multimedia projection as a translation strategy to safeguard endangered languages, traditions, and cultures. In particular, I discuss the case of Vlach-language theatre play *La Căshiari* (*Στο Τυροκομείο / In the Dairy*) by Takis Georgiou (playwright and director), performed on 28 May 2023 with Greek supertitles. Here, both the original text and translation are written by the same author simultaneously, self-translation (see Grutman & Van Bolderen, 2014), rather than translated by a different person; 'an extreme case of the author/work – translator/work dialectic' (Tanqueiro, 2000, p. 63). It is then enriched by other members of the community contributions, who either identify a more appropriate Vlach word or correct the translation to allow for a clearer meaning to be made, which can be seen as an interlinear and group-dialectic approach to translation. As Geraldine Brodie notes, '[t]he intermedial performance of surtitles positions surtitles within new media dramaturgy, creating a form of interlinear translation' (Brodie, 2020, p. 450). Indeed, new technologies allow intermedial approaches in supertitled theatre, reaching beyond textual aspects.

**Keywords:** Translation, supertitles, Vlach-language, endangered-language

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### Introduction: The Folklore Association of Vlachs of Veria

During the spring and summer of 2023, I visited my hometown Veria<sup>1</sup>, also known as Little

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<sup>1</sup> Veria is a city in Central Makedonia, in northern Greece, with a population of 29.669 (based on the 2021 Greek census). Despite its small size, Veria embraces a variety of subcultures and sublanguages, including

Jerusalem of Greece, to undertake preliminary research on endangered-language heritage performance with funding from the Welsh Government's Taith programme. Linguists are warning that 60-90% of the world's languages could be extinct by the end of this century, with languages declining faster than ever before (Crystal, 2002; Nettle & Romaine, 2000; Romaine, 2007; Bisang et al., 2007; Austin & Sallabank, 2011; Dalby, 2003). Thus, researching strategies to transmit and preserve endangered languages is critical, especially in Europe, where more than two thirds of European languages are listed in UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger<sup>2</sup> as 'vulnerable' to 'severely endangered.' Based on empirical research, observations, personal experience, practice research and interviews with key stakeholders, this paper focuses on the use of supertitles and multimedia projection as a translation strategy to safeguard endangered languages, traditions, and cultures.

During this visit I managed to build deep and meaningful connections with the Folklore Association of Vlachs of Veria (*Σύλλογος Βλάχων Βέροιας*) and the Euxeinos Pontic Club of Veria (*Εύξεινος Λέσχη Βέροιας*), actively impacting on their cultural heritage performance strategies, supporting them to transmit and preserve their endangered languages, Vlach/Aromanian and Pontic Greek respectively. I am not going to discuss the work of Euxeinos Pontic Club of Veria in this article, as supertitles are not used in Pontic Greek performances; the language/dialect is an endangered variety of ancient and modern Greek and local audiences can understand most of the dialogues. Instead, I will focus on the case of the Folklore Association of Vlachs of Veria and the Vlach-language theatre play *La Căshiari* by Takis Georgiou (playwright and director), performed on 28 May 2023 with Greek supertitles.

Formed in 1981, the Folklore Association of Vlachs of Veria<sup>3</sup> (henceforth referred to as the Association) aims to record the customs, (historical) traditions and their folklore elements, as well as to safeguard and preserve the Vlach language; a language with over ten centuries of existence that is in danger of disappearing within two decades (Gkalaitis, 2023). According to linguists Alexandra Prentza and Maria Kaltsa (2020), in the context of Vlach-language endangerment, the Greek variety of Vlach language is in even more critical situation, with the danger of disappearing within one generation: 'VA [Vlach Aromanian] has been reported as an endangered language by a number of researchers throughout the years (e.g., Katsanis 1977, Kramer 1987, Katsanis and Dinas 1990, Trudgill 1992a, 1992b, Greek Helsinki Monitor Report 1995, Dahmen 1997, Sella-Mazi 1997, Trudgill 2000, Koufogiorgou 2007 [as cited in Prentza & Kaltsa, 2020]). Additionally, in the Atlas of Europe's endangered languages as well as in the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (Moseley, 2010 [as cited in Prentza & Kaltsa, 2020]), VA is presented as an endangered language in the area of Greece. In the case of the UNESCO Atlas, the state of endangerment varies from definitely endangered to severely endangered depending on the variety' (Prentza & Kaltsa, 2020, p. 628).

Alarmed by the endangerment severity of the Greek variety of Vlach language, the Association operates a range of departments, including costume, dance, singing (choir) and theatre, and it collects and records folklore material, including songs, photographs and folklore artworks. According to Takis Gkalaitis (personal interview, July 8, 2023), former

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Vlach/Aromanian and Pontic Greek. After all, Veria was the second most significant town during ancient Macedonian years (the tomb of Phillip II, Alexander the Great's father is in Vergina, which is part of Veria). Veria was also the capital of Macedonia during the Roman occupation and 'the third most important city of the Byzantine Empire, after Constantinople (now Istanbul) and Thessaloniki' (Greek Tourist Board, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.wal.unesco.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vlahoi.gr/>

president of the Association for several years and author of *Άπο την Ζωή των Βλάχων* (From the Life of Vlachs) book, although in 1981 researchers argued that only four Vlach-language songs exist, today there are over 500 songs, emphasising on the importance of the Association's existence and the work of its volunteers. As a result, the Association has a scientific committee and a rich archive for 'the researcher of the future' (T. Gkalaitis, personal interview, July 8, 2023), based at The House of Vlachs (see Figure 1), a building donated from local Vlachs.



Figure 1: Photos of the The House of Vlachs and its library, Papagiannouli, 2023

The House of Vlachs has a library, a museum, a cloakroom with traditional Vlach costumes for women and men of all ages, meeting rooms, offices, rehearsal spaces and a projector room. The Association organises school tours, leads sessions on Vlach language, theatre, dance, craft making and iconography. Surprisingly, all this rich and significant work is supported by volunteers, members of the Association, with minimum financial resources, mainly coming from donations from local Vlachs<sup>4</sup>. Vlachs are famous for their philanthropy; all the Great donors to re-built Greece as a nation were Vlachs, but one (T. Gkalaitis, personal interview, July 8, 2023).

During the empirical phase of this research project, I attended Vlach-language classes, observed association meetings and had meaningful discussions with community leaders and key stakeholders, allowing knowledge sharing and exchange. I then actively engaged in the preparations and rehearsals of the *La Câshiari* (*Στο Τυροκομείο / In the Dairy*) play, supporting the director and the community in the delivery of the heritage performance. By observing the work of the Association and participating in their heritage performance, I learned not only about the community's cultural heritage but also about my own personal heritage. The surname Papagiannouli is a Vlach surname. My father, M.D. Nikolaos Papagiannoulis (see Figure 2), grew up in a bilingual environment, speaking both Greek and

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<sup>4</sup> I discovered that before moving to The House of Vlachs, the Association would meet for rehearsals at my grandad's empty shop, who granted the space to the Association for its needs.

Vlach languages, and he spent his youth summers at Xerolivado, one of the Vlach villages in Vermio mountain, near Veria. When I visited the Folklore Association of Vlachs of Veria I was welcomed with many stories and anecdotes about my father, family photos, and organic mountain tea collected from his village. According to Takis Gkalaitis (personal interview, July 8, 2023), those with the surname Papagiannouli are really good dancers with unique skills. Besides, “Vlachs first learn to dance and then to walk. First to sing and then to speak” (T. Gkalaitis, personal interview, July 8, 2023).

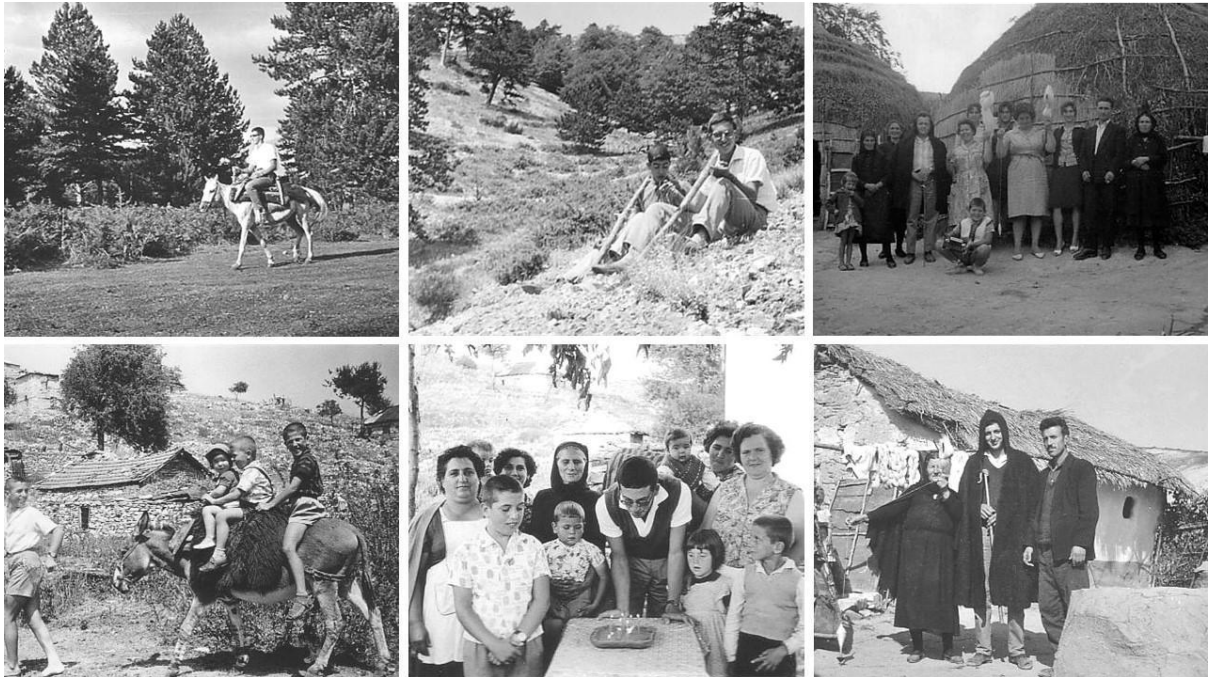


Figure 2: Pictures of M.D. Nikolaos Papagiannoulis at Xerolivado with his family, from his personal collection.

### The *La Căshiari*<sup>5</sup> case

Takis Georgiou wrote the play *La Căshiari* in 2023 for the Association as a means of preserving, safeguarding and widening the use of the Vlach language. As he mentioned in his opening statement before the performance on 28 May, theatre performances, together with songs, poems, fairy tales, jokes and teaching the Vlach language are all part of the effort the Association has been making to safeguard the Vlach language: ‘Specifically, we seek, on the one hand, for those who know the language to bring to their memory hearings of their mother tongue, and on the other hand, to give the opportunity to those who do not know it to come into contact, through their participation in the performance, with the language of their ancestors. At the same time, we hope that it will be an occasion, especially for young children,

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<sup>5</sup> This chapter contains extracts from the unpublished *La Căshiari* play in Vlach, Greek and English languages. I have used the original Vlach and Greek versions as written by the author, Takis Georgiou, and translated the Greek version into English for the purposes of this essay. The Vlach language version is a portmanteau of Greek and Latin alphabets.

to reflect on the issue of the language that is being lost helplessly day by day' (Georgiou, 2023).

The *La Căshiari* play portrays the life of Vlachs cheesemakers in the 1960s, referring to the daily life of the Vlachs of the village and the farm, their jobs and their habits. It takes place in one of the many large cheese-making shops in the village, which, in addition to the processing of dairy products, was also a point of reference for family issues, solving village problems, a place for meetings and social criticism (Georgiou, 2023). Gousias, the main character and owner of the cheese shop, invites his family, co-workers and customers to a feast for his birthday. While the protagonists eat cheese, Vlach spinach pie and drink tsipouro<sup>6</sup>, they narrate stories, tell anecdotes, make jokes to each other, sing and dance Vlach songs.

The intertextuality of the text is evidenced throughout the play, bringing into life Vlach myths, stories, poems and songs, as well as real facts of the performers themselves. For instance, Stergio - Gousias' helper - mentions in the play:

Ιό μι αμιντάϊ του Αρμπινισίϊ, Εγώ γεννήθηκα στην I was born in Albania in the
του χούρα Λούσνια ντι Αλβανία στο χωριό Λούσνια village of Lushnja in the area
λόκλου Μουζακέ, ντι στη περιοχή της Μουζακιάς, of Mouzakia, to Vlach
πάριντζά αρμάρνι σι-ντι έλι από γονείς βλάχους και από parents and from them I
αμβιτσάϊ αρμάνέστι. αυτούς έμαθα τα βλάχικα. Το learned Aromanian. My
Χούρανι εάστι σιάσπράτσι χωριό μου βρίσκεται 16 village is located 16
χιλιόμετρι ντι λα χιλιόμετρα από το μοναστήρι kilometres from the
μαναστέρλου Αρδενίτσα, ιού της Αρδενίτσας, όπου monastery of Ardenica, where the first Vlach script
σ-αφλά λα ούνά νίλι σιάπτι βρέθηκε το 1731, η πρώτη with Greek letters was found
σούτι τριατζάτσι ούνά, πρότα βλάχικη γραφή με ελληνικά in 1731: "Virgin mother of
αρμάνεάκâ σκριϊρι κου γράμματα: "Παρθένος η μητέρα του Θεού δεήσου για God, pray for us sinners".
γκάρτσέστι γράμματι: "Βίργιρε Μούμα-λ τουμνεζί εμάς τους αμαρτωλούς."
"Βίργιρε Μούμα-λ τουμνεζί ώρε τρε νόϊ πεκετόσσοι."

This draws both from the true origin of the performer, Periklibeta Daja (who portrays Stergio), as well as from the fact that the oldest known text in the Aromanian (Vlach) language, a short pray in Greek alphabet, is located in the Christian Orthodox monastery in Adenica, now in Albania.

Moreover, the play draws from true stories related to cheese making and its importance for the economy of the Vlach community. As Takis Georgiou (personal interview, March 23, 2024) emphasises, there used to be over a hundred sheep sheds in Xerolivado, now there is only one left in the village:

Ατσέλι άνι τσε εαρά ζόρι σ Εκείνα τα χρόνια που ήταν In those years when it was
άφλι λούκρου σ-χάρνέστι δύσκολα να βρεις δουλειά να difficult to find a job to feed
φουμεάλια, κάσιέρλι ταίσεις την οικογένεια, τα the family, the cheese
ασκάπάρâ μούλτâ λούμι ντι τυροκομεία γλίτωσαν πολύ factory saved many people
φτόχι, kâ μούλτσâ αφλά κόσμος από την φτώχεια, γιατί from poverty, because many
λούκρου ακλό. Να εαρά πολλοί εύρησαν δουλειά found work there. There was
μάστουρλου ντι kâσκάβάλου. εκεί. Να δούλευε ο the kasseri-cheese expert. He
Αβεά κου έλου ούν κάλφα κασερομάστορας. Είχε μαζί also had a kalfa with him to

<sup>6</sup> Tsipouro is a popular Greek grape-distilled spirit made from solid remains of the grape pressing process in winemaking.

τσε λι ατζούτά .Εαρά σι ατσέλου τσε αντριτζά μπάσλουλου, ντι κάρι σ-αντρά κâσκâβάλου. Λουκρά κâσιάρλου κάρι αγκλιγκά κάσλου σι γκιζάρλου καρ τράτζεά ούμτουλ, σκουτεά γκίζα σι τζάρλου τσε αρμâneά λου ντânτεά λα πόρτσι. Εαρά σι κοφινάρλου καρ λουκρά κâλάθα, ούν λούκρου μούλτου γκρέου λα κâσιάρι. [...] Βόϊ σ-τσά τζâκου Λίτσο, κâ τίνι χίι μα νίκου, κâ αοά του χοάρâ αβεά μούλτι κâπρι, όϊ, μâr κιχâϊάτζ σι- μούλτι κâσιέρι, ου τζâτσι σ-κâντικλου, <<Ξιρουλίβαδ λέλε χοάρâ μσεάτâ, κου κâσιέρλι αμβâρλιγκάτâ>>. Κάσλου, κâσκâβάλιου, μπάτζιου σι-άλτι τσε σ-αντρά κου λάπτι, νου σ-τσιά μάγκι του τούτου Βαλκάνλου, μα ατζιουντζεά σι-pân του Αμέρικâ. Μούλτσâ μαστουρι ντι λα κâσιέρλι ανοάστρι εάρâ αλαβντάτς του τουτâ λούμεα, ακσί ουν λάλα αμέλου λουκρά του Σιρβίι σι ουν άλτου του Ρουμânίι. [...] Αντούσιου αμίντι Λίτσο, κουμ νι-ασπουνεά τάτανι, κâντου, απροάπεα λα ούνâ νίλι νοαουσουτί τριατζâτς(1930), κρίσεα ικονόμικα τσε μπâτού Αμέρικα σι τούτâ λούμεα, βίνι σι αοά του Γκάρτσι σι κιχâϊάζλι νου στεά τσε σ-αντάρι κου μάξούλεα. Κάσλου σ-απριντεά σι λου αρκά λα πόρτσι. Ταξιράτεα τσε πάτσâρâ μούλτσâ κιχâϊάτζ ντι Βέρια εαρά μούλτου γκρεάου, κâ κιρούρâ τούτâ αβεάρεαλâ.

του ένα κάλφα που τον βοηθούσε. Ήταν και εκείνος που δούλευε το μπασκί, από το οποίο γινόταν το κασέρι Δούλευε και ο τυροκόμος που επηξε το τυρί και αυτός που τραβούσε το βούτυρο, έβγαζε την ούρδα και το γάρο που απόμεινε το έδινε στα γουρούνια. Ήταν και αυτός που δούλευε με το καλάθι μία πολύ βαριά στο τυροκομείο. [...] Θέλω να σου πω Λίτσιο, γιατί εσύ είσαι πιο μικρός, ότι εδώ στο χωριό είχε πολλά γίδια, πρόβατα, κεχαγιάδες και πολλά τυροκομεία, το λέει και το τραγούδι, <<Ξηρολίβαδο όμορφο χωριό, περιτριγυρισμένο με τυροκομεία>> Το τυρί, το κασέρι, ο μπάτζιος και ότι γινόταν από γάλα, δεν πήγαιναν μόνο σε όλα τα Βαλκάνια, αλλά έφταναν και μέχρι την Αμερική. Πολλά μαστόρια από τα δικά μας τυροκομεία, ήταν ξακουστοί σε όλο τον κόσμο, έτσι ένας θεός μου δούλευε στη Σερβία και ένας άλλος στη Ρουμανία. [...] Φέρνω στη μνήμη μου Λίτσιο, όπως μου διηγείτο ο πατέρας μου, όταν , γύρω στα 1930, η οικονομική κρίση που έπληξε την Αμερική και όλο τον κόσμο, ήρθε και εδώ στην Ελλάδα και οι τσελιγκάδες δεν ήξεραν τι να κάνουν με τα τυροκομικά προϊόντα. Το τυρί χαλούσε και το έριχναν για τροφή στα γουρούνια. Η συμφορά που υπέστησαν πολλοί τσελιγκάδες από τη Βέρια ήταν πολύ βαριά, γιατί έχασαν όλη την

help him. There was also the one who worked the baski, from which the kasseri was made. There was the cheesemaker who extracted the cheese and the one who pulled the butter, took out the ourda and gave the remaining garo to the pigs. There was also the one who worked with the basket, a very heavy job. [...]

I want to tell you, Litsio, because you are younger, that here in the village there were many goats, sheeps, kehagiades and many cheese factories, as the song says, <<Xeirilivado beautiful village, surrounded by cheese factories>> Cheese, kasseri, batzios and everything made from milk, did not only go to all over the Balkans, but also reached America. Many craftsmen from our cheese factories were famous all over the world, so one uncle of mine worked in Serbia and another in Romania. [...]

I remember Litsio, as my father used to tell me, when, around 1930, the financial crisis that struck America and the whole world came here to Greece and the tselingades did not know what to do with the cheese products. The cheese spoiled and was thrown for food in pigs. Many Tselingas from Veria suffered heavily, because they lost all their belongings.

περιουσία τους.

Apart from autobiographical and historical details, the play also incorporates oral Vlach literature:

Ασπουνί Κίτα σιόρ ασπουνί  
τούτς φουρτάσλι  
ντιβαρλίγκα πάνâ νιέλου  
τρας σι σφρίγκâ. Ασπουνί  
Κίτα όϊ λαϊ τάσλου τσε νι-  
βιτζούρâ όκλιλι ασεάρâ  
κάντα νιέσου λα μπισεάρκâ  
τρας απρίντου σι-ϊό ούνâ  
τσεάρâ. Τσε σι-φου μάρι λαϊ  
μπισεάρκâ, ιού σ-μουτρέστâ  
μίντεα σ-κεάρι. Γκρί  
φουρτάτλου... ασέλι  
ντόϊλι τσε σ-βάργκέσκου.  
Νου βέτζ όρμπε  
ψάλτâσέσκου. Να ντι  
νάπαρτι ντι ούσι εάσι ούν  
κου μπάρμπα μάρι, τσâνι του  
μânâ ουν κα κλόπουτ, τουτ-  
τουτ φούτζι ντρέπ(ου) σι  
κου μânιλι λα κέπτ(ου). Νου  
λιάμ(ου) όκλι κâτρά ντούτσι,  
καντά γίνι σι-νίγκρâ μίνι.  
Μούτ κârλιγκλου νου στάου  
οάρâ, πάνâ σιούτσâ σι-μι  
μουτρεάσκâ ου γκâ ούνâ σι  
σφάκâ γνίνι, ούνâ γκάπου  
πικουρâρεάσκâ. Ελι σ-  
αρκάρâ τους πρι μίνι, φούγκâ  
Κίτα τζâσιου ατουμτσεα, παν  
â σ-τζâτς ούνâ.. ισσι ντιτ-  
χοάρâ, ας μι-ακάτσâ ελι  
ναφοάρâ. Φου κα ζόρι πάν  
σι-λιάου τζεάνα. Όρε φράτς  
νούϊ τρά φούγκ ντι λα όϊ. Βα  
σι-λι αϊ λούκârλι κουράτι, λα  
μπισέρικâ νουϊ τρά νόϊ.

Διηγείται ο Κίτας και  
ξαναδιηγείται όλοι οι φίλοι  
γύρω-γύρω μέχρι το αρνάκι  
να ψηθεί. Διηγείται ο Κίτας  
όρε φίλοι μου, τι μου είδαν  
τα μάτια μου εχθές το βράδυ  
όταν πήγα στην εκκλησία για  
να ανάψω και εγώ ένα κερί.  
Τί φάνταζε μεγάλη η  
εκκλησία, όπου να κοιτάξεις  
το μυαλό σου χάνεται.  
Φώναξε ο φίλος, αυτοί οι δύο  
τι μαλώνουν. Δεν βλέπεις  
τυφλέ ψέλλουν. Να από πέρα  
από την πόρτα βγαίνει ένας  
με τα γένια του μεγάλα,  
κρατάει στο χέρι του ένα σαν  
κουδούνι και όλο-όλο φεύγει  
μπροστά και με τα χέρια του  
στο στήθος. Δεν είχα τα  
μάτια μου προς τα που πήγε,  
όταν ήρθε κοντά μου.  
Σηκώνω την γκλίτσα, δεν  
κάθομαι ώρα μέχρι που να  
γυρίσει να με κοιτάξει, την  
έφαγε μία για καλά, μία στο  
κεφάλι αλλά τσομπανίστηκα.  
Αυτοί πέσανε όλοι σ'εμένα,  
φεύγα Κίτα είπα τότε, μέχρι  
που να πεις ένα, βγήκα από  
το χωριό, ας με πιάσουν  
αυτοί έξω. Ζορίστηκα μέχρι  
που να πιάσω την κορυφή.  
Όρε αδέρφια δεν είναι να  
φεύγουμε από τα πρόβατα.  
Πρέπει να έχεις τα πράγματα  
καθαρά, στην εκκλησία δεν  
είναι για εμάς.

Kitas tells and retells the  
story and all the friends [sit]  
around [him] until the lamb  
is cooked. Kitas narrates, my  
friends, [you will not  
believe] what my eyes saw  
last night when I went to  
church to light a candle. How  
big the church looked,  
wherever you look your  
mind is lost. A friend  
shouted, what are these two  
arguing about? Are you  
blind, can't you see they are  
chanting. From beyond the  
door, a man with a long  
beard comes out, holding a  
bell in his hand and slowly  
walks forward with his hands  
on his chest. I couldn't see  
where he went when he came  
to me. I picked up the stick,  
it was not long until he  
turned to look at me, I gave  
him one good hit [with the  
stick], one on the head but I  
got punched. They all fell on  
me. Leave Kita, I said then,  
before you say one, I left the  
village, let them catch me  
outside. It was challenging to  
reach the top. Brothers, we  
should not leave the sheep.  
You should keep things  
clean, church is not for us.

Takis Georgiou learned the Kitas poem from his aunt. He later discovered that it is written in the Vlach dialect of Frasariotes (aka Arvanitovlahoi) who were mainly based at Frasari (Frashër) in Albania, but he is still not aware of its origin (T. Georgiou, personal interview, March 23, 2024). Vlach is a Latin oral language with multiple variations based on locations where it is spoken. Vlach-language speakers in Greece are bilingual, learning the Vlach language mainly from their grandparents. Thus, oral literature is an important element

of the endangered-language's history, presence and future, as it has been the main way of distributing and keeping the language alive through the centuries.

The play also documents several dirty jokes/stories, one of which is narrated by Papadia, the wife of the priest:

Εαρά ντοάου βιτσινι συ	Ήταν δύο γειτόνισσες και	Two neighbours say to each
τζάτσι ούνα αλί αλάντâ	λέει η μία στην άλλη:	other:
Εαράϊ νιπτούτâ?	- Ήσουν άρρωστη;	- Were you sick?
Νου κâτσέ ντρέγκι?	- Όχι, γιατί ρωτάς;	- No, why do you ask?
Ε να βιτζούϊ γιάτρουλου σι-	- Ε να, είδα το γιατρό να	- Well, I saw the doctor going
ιντâ-εάσâ α κάσâ βâ	μπαινοβγαίνει στο σπίτι σας.	in and out of your house.
Κâτσέ, λα τίνι κâντου ιντρά-	- Γιατί, σε σένα όταν	- Why, when the general
ισεά στρατιγόλου, αβεάμ	μπαινόβγαине ο στρατηγός,	came in and out, did we have
πόλιμ(ου)?	είχαμε πόλεμο;	war?

Humour could not be missing from the play. Not only because the Vlach community enjoys sharing anecdotes during gatherings<sup>7</sup>, but also as a way to demonstrate that the Vlach language is alive and used by its native speakers. As Kourdis notes, 'humorous competence is part of the linguistic, communicative and socio-cultural competence of native speakers' (Kourdis, 2008).

The play closed with Vlach songs and a Vlach dance:

Έσταν νου γίνου, εσταν νου	Φέτος δεν έρχονται, φέτος	This year they won't come,
γίνου φουμέλι ντι νγκιόσου.	δεν έρχονται φαμιλιές	this year they won't come
Αϊντι έσταν νου γίνου	(Οικογένειες) από κάτω.	families from below. This
φουμέλι ντι Βέρια, νέκâ	Φέτος δεν έρχονται φαμίλιες	year no families are coming
Ντόλιαν(ι), νέκâ Σέλια.(2)	(Οικογένειες) από τη	from Veria, neither Doliani
Εστανου νου αβέμ, έστανου	Βέροια, ούτε στη Ντόλιανη	nor Seli (2). This year we
νου αβέμου λânâ σ-	ούτε στο Σέλι (2). Φέτος δεν	don't have, this year we don't
λουκράμου Αϊντε έστανου	έχουμε, φέτος δεν έχουμε	have wool to work with.
νου αβέμου λânâ σ-	μαλλί να δουλέψουμε. Αϊντε	Alas, this year we have no
λουκράμου νε παράτζ σ-	φέτος δεν έχουμε μαλλί να	wool to work with, nor
ακουμπάρâμ(ου).(2) Ντούτι	δουλέψουμε, ούτε λεφτά να	money to buy (2). Go
μάναμ, ντούτι μάναμ λα	αγοράσουμε (2). Πήγαινε	mother, go mother to the
κιχâϊτζ. Αϊ ντούτι μάναμ λα	μάνα μ', πήγαινε μάνα μ'	Kehaya [Othoman Turkish
κιχâϊτζ νάκâ σ-ντα φârà	στους κεχαγιάδες. Αι	title]. Oh, mother, go to the
παράτζ.(2) Αϊντι πρίτ ανόϊ σ-	πήγαινε μάνα μ' στους	kehaya, maybe they will give
πριτ κατόϊ νου άουμου	κεχαγιάδες, μήπως σου	you without money (2).
παράτζ σ-πâλτεάσκâ αγόϊ.(2)	δώσουν χωρίς λεφτά (2).	From top to bottom, I have
	Αϊντε απ' το ανώϊ στο κατώϊ,	no money to pay (2).
	δεν έχω λεφτά να πληρώσω	
	τ' αγώγι (2).	

As with any feast, singing and dancing is present. However, here the presence of folklore songs and dances is significant for safeguarding the endangered language as well as the historical traditions of an endangered culture. The songs and their lyrics transport historical information of the life of Vlachs in a performative way. Besides, as the Vlachs say,

<sup>7</sup> I was lucky to experience some of those jokes, narrated from an older woman of the community during a choir rehearsal gatherings.



“cându unâ mileti s-cheari, aestu dit soni lucru cari tsîni cheptu easti muzica” [when a race is lost, in the end the one that puts forward the chest and resists, is the music].

In the case of *La Căshiari*, both the original text and translation are written by the same author simultaneously, self-translation (see Grutman & Van Bolderen, 2014), rather than translated by a different person; ‘an extreme case of the author/work – translator/work dialectic’ (Tanqueiro, 2000, p.63). It is then enriched by other members of the community contributions, who either identify a more appropriate Vlach term or correct the translation to allow for a clearer meaning to be made. In the Greek variety of the Vlach language there are often original Vlach terms and terms with similar meaning borrowed from the Greek language. This interlinear and group-dialectic approach to translation not only enriches the glossary of the play, documenting key terms of the endangered language, but also becomes an active and interactive language learning exercise for contributors and audience participants.

### **Supertitles as Translation**

Using supertitles in theatre, a form of ‘Theater translation (TT)<sup>8</sup>’ (Griesel, 2000) is a common practice for international theatre festivals. It is mainly used for translating foreign productions to its international audiences; a practice that has been criticised for visually distracting audiences and for providing an abbreviated version of the spoken version (Carlson, 2006). Indeed, it is impossible for audiences to rapidly read the supertitles and follow the performance simultaneously, especially with longer texts, as ‘one of the distinctive features of TT is that it is experienced only once at a particular moment and time’ (Griesel 2005, p. 63). Audiences cannot pause, go back or re-watch the exact same performance as each theatre performance is unique. This might not be an issue in classical theatre productions where most if not all audience members have some knowledge and understanding of the play, but supertitles are necessary for newly developed plays that audiences are not familiar with.

In the case of endangered-language heritage performances, supertitling is key for safeguarding the language and reaching wider audiences. Although I am not a Vlach speaker, I was responsible for the *La Căshiari* supertitles during the rehearsals and the performance. This allowed me not only to learn about the life and traditions of Vlachs, but also was a language learning exercise through closely following the spoken Vlach language and linking it to its translation in Greek on the powerpoint presentation. During rehearsals, some of the performers used the supertitles to remember their lines, translating the translated version in real-time. At the actual performance, supertitles were positioned behind them, presenting a challenge for the performers who could not easily interact with the supertitles during the live performance. In that case the projected supertitles had to follow the spoken version, changing the slide as soon as the next character spoke. Here the projection of the supertitles did not disturb the audience. Instead, I argue that the supertitles projection added a performative element to the simplicity of the set up and the staging, 3 sofas and a table with performers mainly sitting in front of the projection without much movement. Supertitles would rarely change when performers moved, as audiences would applaud performers at every entrance

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<sup>8</sup> Theatre Translation (TT), coined by Yvonne Giesel in 2000, refers to oral and written translation practices (including supertitling and simultaneous interpretation) of theatrical productions for audiences of different languages (Giesel 2005:62-3).

and exit, moments where everyone paused for the applause to stop (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GO6KfkYJyB4>).

The art of supertitling has advanced over the past years, with updated technologies and different media being introduced. However, this is not the case in low-budget heritage performances, where limited resources are available. Moreover, supertitles are not able to translate the improvised scenes during the live performance and often the reading speed cannot catch up the speed of the slide changes. Despite these limitations, the benefit of supertitles in endangered-language heritage performance is critical, as it allows community members who do not speak the language to hear the language of their ancestors, to understand its meaning and learn about their history and traditions. Most importantly it breaks language barriers between the endangered community itself, bringing different generations together to celebrate their culture and (re-)connect through theatre, music and dance. In comparison to mainstream theatre supertitling, where supertitles act as channels of communication translating the voice of the author for international audiences, here supertitling acts as a tool to promote and facilitate endangered-language learning for both performers and audience. Surtitles can provide beginner and intermediate endangered-language learners with the opportunity to directly experience the language, reinforcing listening comprehension. As Milane Pridmore-Franz argues, attending an endangered-language supertitled theatre performance is a form of ‘linguistic immersion’; ‘an occasion to be involved in an authentic cultural experience while passively learning about the language and culture by being exposed to authentic language input’ (M. Pridmore-Franz, 2017, p. 17).

### **Multimedia Projection as Translation**

Apart from supertitles, images from the life of Vlachs cheesemakers (see Figure 3) and folklore songs enriched the projection, ‘translating’ the text not only literally, but also in a performative way, safeguarding the language, traditions, and culture of the Vlach-speaking Greeks. As Geraldine Brodie notes, ‘[t]he intermedial performance of surtitles positions surtitles within new media dramaturgy, creating a form of interlinear translation’ (Brodie, 2020, p.450). Indeed, new technologies allow intermedial approaches in supertitled theatre, reaching beyond textual aspects.



Figure 3: The *La Căshiari* performance poster, outside The House of Vlachs on the left and outside the performance space at Star Cinema on the right. Papagiannouli, 2023

The historical photographs ‘translated’ visually the play, enriching the nostalgic elements of the play for older audiences and giving the opportunity to younger ones to visualise the life of their ancestors. As Takis Gkalaitis (personal interview, July 8, 2023) noted, many of the audience left the performance crying, because they heard their mother’s language, or they saw a picture they recognised. Gkalaitis himself recognised a family member that had passed away in one of the photos during rehearsals, commenting on the nostalgic elements of these pictures. Indeed, even when the performance was presented in Romania in October 2023 (in Bucharest and Constanta), audiences were emotionally connected with the performance and the projected images. Here textual supertitles were not used, as all audience members were Vlach speakers. Instead, the photographs acted as supertitles, ‘translating’ elements from the life of Vlachs and locations in Northern Greece. Characteristically, the lawyer and poet in Romania Giorgos Vranas, originally from Xirolivado, in a similar case, said: ‘The Vlachs of Veria with their dance, costume and songs took us to the depths of history. It’s like I’m seeing images from a Manakia film<sup>9</sup>. This is not folklore, it is theater, it is noble art. We here in Romania must imitate them. Because they keep our roots, which are in Macedonia [a region in Greece where Veria is part of]’ (Press Committee of Association of Vlachs of Veria, 2023).

The use of photographic projection in theatre offers multiple layers of engagement, serving as translation in its own right. It not only enhances the translation but also creates an intermedial and immersive experience that can transfer audiences across linguistic, cultural and geographical boundaries. This photographic journey fosters a shared experience of nostalgia in the communal space of theatre, digging into the collective cultural memories, in Maurice Halbwachs’ (1925) terms, and the personal histories of the audience.

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<sup>9</sup> Manakia brothers were two Greek Vlach filmmakers who are considered pioneers of cinematography in the Balkans and have filmed several ethnographic documentaries capturing key historical events between 1905 and 1963.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated by the *La Căshiari* performances, in the case of endangered-language heritage performance, translation extends beyond the mere conversion of text from one language to another; it encompasses the broader endeavour of transmitting language, culture, and memory, across linguistic and geographical boundaries, in order to safeguarding the language in danger. I argue that supertitles and the use of photographs are key translation tools of endangered-language theatre. Supertitles break linguistic barriers in real time during the performance, opening a direct window into the cultural essence of the endangered language. This ‘linguistic immersion’ can be seen as a language-learning exercise, widening participation and engagement with the language in danger. At the same time, projected photographs act as cultural and historical translators, offering visual cues that enhance the cues of the performers, providing insights into cultural norms, traditions, memories and landscapes.

The risk of the Vlach language becoming a ‘dead language’, and in particular the Greek varieties of Vlach Aromanian is now more evident than ever. The work of the Folklore Association of Vlachs of Veria and of other Vlach associations and individuals, although significant and profound, might not be enough to safeguard it. These communities and individuals need the support of local Governments, authorities, educational institutions and of researchers from a variety of disciplines, including linguistics, folklore studies, theatre, music, as well as tourism and business studies, to help them keep their language spoken and alive. I hope this paper places a small stone in this effort, by sharing Vlach-language extracts of the *La Căshiari* play, including oral literature that has survived for decades without being formally written, and by discussing the work of the Association and its membership. This self-heritage journey has been both emotional and eye-opening for me, learning about the language, the traditions and the history of my father’s and grandfather’s origin.

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