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## **The Language Situation in Contemporary Georgia**

### **2. Caucasian and Non-Caucasian Languages**

#### **Abstract**

In the second part of the article conclusive results of the project "Sociolinguistic situation in contemporary Georgia " are presented regarding the distribution of languages and their interrelations with other languages in Georgia. The research was conducted in 2006 - 2008 and focussed on the language politics, education and other significant aspects in the country.

Together with ethnic differences, Georgia is characterised by linguistic variety. In the first part of the article the issues of the attitude of the State language towards other Kartvelian, related languages were discussed as well as the methodology employed in the project and main concepts and terms which had to be defined precisely to avoid ambiguity (Gabunia, 2014). In this article I will also discuss the situation regarding the languages which are traditionally referred to as "minority" languages (see below). Within the frames of the project "Sociolinguistic situation in contemporary Georgia", in order to depict the "linguistic portrait" of Georgia, 6 working groups were created:

I - Group for Georgian literary language  
II - Group for Kartvelian languages  
III - Group for Caucasian languages  
IV - Group for Non-Caucasian languages;  
V - Group for Georgian language dialects  
VI -Group for migrations and digital processing.

In the previous article I presented discussion and summing up of the research results conducted by the first-two groups. Below I will present the summing up of the findings provided by two groups: Group for the Caucasian languages (Group leader Taniel Sikharulidze) and that of the non-Caucasian languages (Group leader Merab Babukhadia). The data include both the raw material from

the questionnaires as well as the recorded audio-material.<sup>1</sup>

The target groups of the project were the groups speaking minority languages and living compactly as well as dispersively.<sup>2</sup>

In this respect Georgia presents an extremely variable picture. 4 regions could be singled out in which the representatives of a minority live compactly: Abkhazians (representatives of Caucasian languages) ; Ossetians and Armenians (representatives of Indo-European family); Azerbaijanis (Alatai - Turkish languages family – Tabatadze, Gabunia, Odzeli, 2008, p.9).

1. Abkhazians live in the north-western part of Georgia - between two rivers the Enguri and the Psou, along the Black Sea coast. According to the poll in 1989, their number reached 100,000 (In the whole territory of Georgia, including the places of dispersive settlements).

Today their number is almost halved ( due to the military actions and migration processes). A small part of ethnic Abkhazians live in Achara (Tabatadze, Gabunia, Odzeli, 2008, p.10).

2. Ossetians live compactly in the Northern part of Shida Kartli as well as in several parts of South Georgia and Kakhetia.

A fairly large number of them are dispersely settled in the whole territory of Eastern Georgia. According to the census in Telavi of 1989, the number of Ossetians equalled 165,000. Nowadays, after the conflicts, the number of the Ossetian population has also decreased dramatically (Tabatadze, Gabunia, Odzeli, 2008, p.10).

3. Armenians mostly live in Samtskhe-Javakheti and the Tsalka district, Kvemo Kartli. Regarding the number of minority population, Armenians come second after the Azeris.

4. Azerbaijanians are settled compactly mostly in Kvemo Kartli (Southern-Eastern part of Georgia) and Shida Kartli (Tabatadze, 2010).

It is worth mentioning as well that compact settlements of Armenian, Ossetian and Azeri groups border their ethnic motherland. For instance, the region of Kvemo Kartli where Ethnic Azeris live compactly, borders the Republic of Azerbaijan whereas Samtskhe-Javakheti, where ethnic Armenians live compactly, borders the Republic of Armenia. I believe that determination of the sociolinguistic image of these two languages and implementation of adequate linguistic policy (based on their number and specificity) urges one to apply different approaches. The

linguistic situation in Abkhazia is even more peculiar: This is an ethnic group which is only settled in Georgia and does not have any ethnic territory or motherland but Georgia (Tabatadze, Gabunia, Odzeli, 2008, p.11).

Besides these 4 groups there are several compactly settled language groups which occupy a very special place from the point of view of sociolinguistic situation. Specifically, the situation of Pankis Kists, Udis and Batsbs must be discussed separately (see below).

There are some ethnic groups in Georgia which do not live compactly in the regions of Georgia (so called dispersive settlements) such as Russians, Greeks, Israelis, Kurds, Yesids, Assirians, Ukrainians, etc. (Gabunia, 2014: 67-69). It should be noted that these ethnic groups are not homogenous. For instance, the Greek diaspora consists of two groups, one of which speaks Turkish whereas the other – Greek (Svanidze, 2002, see below).

The issue of the majority is also very specific (made up by Georgians) which in the regions where ethnic minorities are settled compactly is presented as minority, such as Kvemo Kartli and Samtkhe-Javakheti making up majority into minority (Gabunia, Tabatadze, Odzeli, 2008) A language policy should depict and find a solution to this challenge as well: they should protect ethnic minorities as well as the ethnic majority, presented as ethnic minority in several

regions (Tabatadze, Gabunia, Odzeli, 2008, p.16).

In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia regained its independence. Forceful migratory politics implemented by the Soviet Union (which was formally known as 'Federation' in reality was a unitary state) formed a number of ethnic issues in the ex-Soviet states after its collapse. The **Russian language** was the language of communication between the local population and ethnic minorities. As a result of the Soviet language policy, ethnic groups living in Georgia - Russians, Armenians, Azeris, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Kurds and others became part of Russian language community. After Georgia gained independence there was a crucial need to implement a corresponding language policy, as radical changes in the political reality of the country also changed the social position of such groups. Georgia chose a liberal way and conferred citizenship to all the peoples living on its territory. However, this 'zero' politics did not prove to be sufficient for the ethnic groups to be loyal to **the Georgian state as they got the citizenship in spite of the fact that they had not applied for it.**

From this standpoint, the classification of ethnic minorities living in Georgia can be referred to as 'Non-Voluntary' minority (Ogbie, 1991)

The language policy is administered in some form on the territory of the state notwithstanding the status (whether the state is monolingual or multi-lingual). In the case of a monolingual state, the main issues are elaboration and protection of literary standards whereas in a multilingual state the issue regarding the regulation of relationships between the peoples remains crucial, which, in turn, is directly connected with the language policy established by the country.

As a rule, one of the most important tasks of the language policy is establishment of a 'hierarchy' between the languages which means giving a dominant status and creating corresponding conditions for the development of one of them (state language). Generally this involves the state status of the language which differentiates its official (legal) and factual status. The former implies determining its official (legal) status in legal acts whereas the latter depends on the following parameters: the number of

speakers, range of usage, social-demographic situation, prestige, political tendencies, etc.

Discrepancy between the legal and factual statuses was observed in Soviet Georgia which brought interesting results: Georgian "state language" was compulsory for the representatives of the nation. Part of the non-Georgian population commanded it on the colloquial level while receiving education in Russian. Although Armenian, Azeris, Abkhazians and Ossetians had the opportunity and right to learn in their mother tongues, Georgian was still considered to be a compulsory subject.

The Russian language in such schools had the status of a foreign language. However, a great part of such a population did not (or could not) use this right and preferred to learn Russian (which was considered to be a prestigious language).

Thus, Georgian which legally had a status of a state language was either ignored or just formally taught and learned. It should also be taken into account that in such regions Russian schools were especially popular and the 'elite' part of such a population took their children to Russian schools. In monolingual Russian schools the children did not learn

Georgian. Moreover, it was a serious problem to learn their own language.

According to the established situation the Russian language became compulsory for people speaking national languages and not *vice versa*.

It should also be added that objectively, the discrepancy between the official and factual statuses, was not only a Soviet occurrence and that it emerged in many other countries (Tabatadze, Gabunia, Odzeli, 2008, p.14).

It is worth noting that people whose national language belonged to 'minority' languages should be multilingual theoretically. ( 1. Their own native language; 2. State language ( Georgian) and 3. Russian).

However, in reality, the components of bilingualism were their native language and Russian, which was learnt at school.

The Russian language was the only means of communication in local tertiary education institutions.

Russian was also a language of documentation. As a result, various bilinguist forms including Russian and a minority language were formed in Georgia, including Russian - Abkhazian, Russian - Armenian,

Russian - Azeri, Russian - Greek (T. Sikharulidze, 2008 )

## **Compactly settled Linguistic Minorities**

### **The Abkhazian Language**

The Abkhazian language belongs to the Northwest, or Abkhazian - Adyghe group. Two dialects are singled out: Bzip and Abzhywa. Bzip is spread in the North west part of Sukumi whereas Abzhywa is spread in the North east part of the region. The difference between these dialects is mostly phonetic. Specifically, the Bzip dialect has a more complex phonetical system which is expressed by several specific sounds which are not testified in Abzhywa. As well as this, there are some differences regarding the lexical systems although lexical differences do not interfere with the communication between the people speaking these dialects of the language.

Abkhazian literary language is based on the Abzhywa dialect.

The Abaza language is very close to the Abkazian language . Moreover, Abkhazian and Abaza languages actually make up one whole linguistic unity. However, as the people lived in separate territories and their

literary languages were based on different bases became it possible to distinguish Abkhazian (literary) language from Abaza (literary) language.

Adyghe (Adyghe, Circassians and Kabardians) and Ubykh also belong to the same language group. The latter lived in the vicinity of Sochi till 1864 and currently are mostly settled in Turkey. As well as this, Abkhazians are closer to Georgians regarding a number of cultural and mundane customs as well as Abkhazians' language and anthropological type, which can be explained by long-term contacts between these two peoples.

Abkhazians call themselves 'Absua' whereas Georgians refer to them 'Abkhazebi'. This ethnic term which spread from Georgian is currently more accepted in the wider world.

In Turkish and other North-Caucasian languages, the Abkhazians are referred to as 'Abaza'.

The Abkhazian language possesses the status of a state language in the territory of Abkhazia. There should be fewer problems for a state language although after the Georgian - Abkhazian conflict the status of Abkhazian as a state language became utterly

formal and the Russian language which also has the status of a state language of the self-announced republic, has completely taken over.

Besides Abkhazia, the Abkhazian language is represented in Western Ajara where Abkhazians live compactly in Adlia, Angisa and Peria, close to Batumi. Abkhazians moved to Ajara at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century after a part of them were left in Ajara after being persecuted from Abkhazia. Abkhazians living in Ajara have retained their customs, family names and first names. However, they no longer can speak Abkhazian. Older generations do not remember Abkhazian well or they pretend that they do. Younger generations prefer to communicate in Georgian, or in certain cases - in Russian.

It is worth noting that older generations have practically forgotten Abkhazian and thus, cannot teach the language to the younger Abkhazians.

As it was mentioned above, in Abkhazia (in the territory of the self-announced Republic of Abkhazia) the Abkhazian language faces a great challenge. The language of communication in Abkhazia is Russian and not Abkhazian. Currently ethnic

Abkhazians are not fluent in Abkhazian and the percentage of such people compared to the monolingual population (speaking only Russian) is very small. The younger generation practically does not know their mother tongue or does not use it in everyday life.

Before the Georgian - Abkhazian conflict Abkhazia revealed a distinctive trilinguism (Abkhazian, Georgian/Megrelian and Russian languages). In places where Armenians, Greeks or other minorities lived, bilingualism was also distinctly observed. Such a population knew their own language and Russian (in rare cases - Georgian).

The language of communication was Russian for both Georgians and Abkhazians. Megrelian was also wide spread among the population. Those Abkhazians who lived in Ochamchire and Gali districts or had a Georgian mother, also spoke Megrelian.

This situation changed radically after the conflict when the Georgian population was forced to leave Abkhazia.

It can be argued that currently the Language situation in Abkhazian is bilingual which includes Abkhazian and Russian languages. Frequently the knowledge of Abkhazian is confined to the **oral speech**. Abkhazians mostly have Russian education and

possess elementary reading and writing skills in Abkhazian (except for exceptional cases).

The Abkhazian - Russian bilingualist situation (unlike the trilinguist situation before the conflict) which was formed in Abkhazia after the Georgians were forcibly ejected from their homes can last for quite a long period of time with insignificant deflections to either of the directions. This will happen only if both of the languages have equal or even a similar level of development as well as opportunities. In any other case the range of the employment of one language is decreased and it is used only in everyday situations which leads to its disappearance.

The Abkhazian language faces an apparent danger of extinction. Non-existence of full Abkhazian schools hampers not only the process of accumulation of knowledge but also acquisition of the tool of usage of the knowledge - **the language**.

Incomplete informativeness of Abkhazian (massmedia, literature, theatre, cinema), lack of suitable state support, very low level of public spirit and culture, including that of the language culture: all of these factors condition the current state of the Abkhazian language.

## The Ossetian Language

The Ossetian language is a North Iranian language and belongs to the Indo European languages. Ossetians speak in two dialects- Iron and Digor. The literary language is based on the Iron dialect.

Ossetians are one of the numerous minorities in Georgia. At the end of the 1980s their number all over Georgia was 160,000 and came after Azeris and Armenians. This number was drastically affected by the conflict in the territory of the South Ossetian Autonomous Republic in the beginning of the 1990s (Tabatadze, Gabunia, Odzeli, 2008, p.10-11).

While discussing bilingualism the degree and level of the command of the second language and its attitude towards the mother tongue should also be considered. In this respect the sociolinguistic situation in the territory of ex-South Ossetia differs radically from the situation before the conflict in the region.

By 1991 ( according to the official data) there were 45 Secondary schools (36 monolingual (Ossetian), 3 (Georgian - Ossetian) and 6 (Georgian - Russian - Ossetian) . Ossetian schools opened beyond

the South Ossetian Oblast as well. For instance, in the Khashuri district there were 30 Ossetian schools. In 1928 - 29 there were 27 Ossetian schools , beyond the Oblast, whereas in the beginning of the 1930s in most districts in Georgia there were Ossetian schools. In 1939 - 40 the number of school children there was 34,547. In South Ossetia there were 20,000 Ossetian schoolchildren and 7,000 Georgian schoolchildren.

Currently the Ossetian language is taught only as one of the subjects. If earlier it was a language of tuition in primary schools, now the Ossetian language has lost this function.

Unfortunately, the process of optimisation which took place as part of reforms in the educational system of Georgia, affected Ossetian schools as well. Before the optimisation, in Lagodekhi district there were several Ossetian schools in the following villages: **Areshperni**, **Pona**, **Khechil**, **Bolkvi** and **Pichkhi-Bogiri**. The schools in Areshperni and Pona were secondary schools whereas those in Bolkvi and Pichkhi-Bogiri were incomplete and had only 9 forms. As for the school in Khechili, it was only primary. After the optimisation only two schools remained: in Areshperni



and Pona. The school in Khechi was closed down due to the lack of pupils and the schools in Pichkhi-Bogiri and Bolkvi were merged with that of Areshperni public school. The status 'Ossetian' in these schools refers only to the fact that in such schools the native tongue is taught as one of the subjects and the language of tuition is Georgian on the secondary as well as primary levels.

Nowadays, as well as in the case of the Abkhazian language, Ossetian - Russian bilingualism is present in the territory of the self-announced South Ossetian republic.

For obvious reasons, within the frames of the project the research was conducted and the survey was organised only in the groups living within the territory under the jurisdiction of Georgia (Shida Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kakheti). Part of the Ossetians believe that their native language is Ossetian as they are Ossetians whereas the second group indicates that their native language is Georgian as it was their first language and that of tuition. The third group thinks that their native languages are both Ossetian and Georgian.

Part of the Ossetians taking part in the survey do not speak Ossetian, do not have

Ossetian books at home and those who can read and write in Ossetian, are not fluent.

Although the population watches both Georgian TV channels and Ossetian programmes from Tskhinval, they believe that they feel much more comfortable watching Georgian programmes.

Generally, it should be claimed that the Ossetians living in the territory of Georgia under Georgian jurisdiction can be characterised as stably bilingual (Ossetian and Georgian). Their Patoi, the language they use in the family, is Ossetian together with Georgian, thus they use a mixed code or, in other words, a sub-code.

Codified bookish-literary language for Ossetians is only Georgian. Georgian is also a language of communication with state structures and administration.

### **The Azeri Language**

The Azeri Language belongs to the Southwestern group of the Alatai-Turkish family. It is an official language in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the most important language in the Iran Islamic Republic.

Azeris live in the republic of Azerbaijan, the Eastern part of the Southern Caucasus.

They are also settled compactly in Georgia (Kvemo and Shida Kartli Regions, Kakheti), Dagestan and Iran. According to statistics, Azeris make up about 7% of the population in Georgia, 19.2% of which live in urban areas whereas the the remaining part live in rural areas.

The number of Azeris living in Georgia rose in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when they overcame all the other ethnic minorities regarding the birth rate. In 30 years their percentage in the population of Georgia doubled and they make up the most numerous ethnic minority currently living in Georgia. The number of Azeri-speaking population in Kvemo Kartli makes up 45% of the population. In addition, they are compactly settled in the Telavi, Lagodekhi and Sagarejo regions (Kakheti) and Mtkhseta and Kaspi districts (Shida Kartli).

The majority of Azeris living in Kvemo Kartli do not speak the State language.

Due to the long-term flaws in the educational system of Georgia, they can speak only one language (Azeri) and while communicating with other ethnic groups, cannot use Russian either as Russian, which was a language of communication among ethnic groups in Georgia during the Soviet Union, is gradually losing its function since Georgia regained independence. If years ago the Azeris living in Georgia were bilingual, (in some cases, even trilingual), currently the

majority of this ethnic group is monolingual – they do not know Russian. There are systemic issues regarding teaching Georgian and due to this, the Azeri population speaks only the Azeri language which creates many problems from the point of their integration and communication.

Since the 1990s the issue of teaching Georgian to ethnic groups has been one of the main tasks in the process of integration of ethnic groups into the society. However, the actions made by the State have been ineffective so far and have brought insufficient results. Reforms which are being carried out in the system of Georgian education are long-term and will not yield any results for several years at least. Until 2010, if not knowing Georgian, the Azeri population which desired to get a tertiary education mostly went to Azerbaijan. After the so-called ‘policy of concession’ the Azeris have been given the opportunity to take exams in Georgian universities which lays a real foundation on the way of their integration into the Georgian society. The last 4 years have made a lot of difference in this respect.

Due to not knowing of the state language, the population cannot access Georgian news

on TV. There is only one news programme on Channel 1 (Public broadcaster) which is broadcast once a week and which makes the Azeris from Kvemo Kartli watch more foreign programmes (mostly Azeri, Turkish and Russian). It is also a fact that Azeri media is not developed in Georgia. The TV programmes in Kvemo Kartli spread in a limited area and the process of broadcasting is slow and does not work smoothly. The Azeri media is also weakly developed. The newspaper "The Gurjistan", though ineffective, has been in circulation since 1921. Due to the above discussed factors, the population of Kvemo Kartli are better informed regarding the processes going on in Azerbaijan than in Georgia.

The culture and customs of the Azeris living in Georgia are maintained by Azeri schools active in Georgia (about 120 schools). In addition, the Azeri culture house, folk groups, NGOs are aimed at developing Azeri culture together with the Azeri Cultural Centre and Tbilisi State Azeri theatre, both active in Tbilisi.

The native tongue of the Azeris is the Azeri language which is used in the families. An Azeri child starts talking in Azeri. However, the last few years witnessed the

tendency to take Azeri children into Georgian schools which is a positive tendency regarding their integration into Georgian society. However, this also creates a number of issues which should be solved by the educational system. Unfortunately, the latter is not ready yet. It would be much more effective if the Azeri children were taken into Georgian kindergartens into special groups under the guidance of teachers trained for these target groups. (The first steps are already being made in these directions). Those children who go to Azeri kindergartens, can speak Georgian when they enter school unlike those children who do not go to Georgian kindergartens and who cannot speak the State language at all, or know a few words, which makes it difficult to master the curriculum.

### **The Armenian Language**

The Armenina language belongs to the family of Indo-European languages though making up an independent branch of the family.

Armenians represent the core population in the Republic of Armenia. In addition, they compactly live in the self-proclaimed

republic of Karabakh as well as in more than 60 countries in the world, including Georgia.

According to the 2002 census, the Armenian population makes up about 5.7% of the whole population of Georgia (4,661,500). They live in towns and regions although more of them are settled in Tbilisi, Samtkhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Ajara and the Abkhasian autonomous republic (Tabatadze, Gorgadze, 2014, pp. 281-300).

The majority of the population living in Javakheti does not speak Georgian. Russian, which used to be the only language of communication with ethnic groups lost its function in the 1990s. Due to the Soviet heritage and long-term faults in the language educational policy, the local population can only speak Armenian or Russian. For certain reasons (for example, deployment of Russian military forces in Akhaltzix and Akhalkalaki till 2005. As well as this, the majority of the population regularly commutes to Russia in search of workplaces), unlike the Azeri population, Russian still retains its function of communication in this region. In recent years, development of the trilingual pattern is also noticeable although this process is still in its embryonic stage.

Unlike the Javakheti Armenian population, Armenians living in Tbilisi know Georgian more or less which is due to the fact that in Tbilisi the Armenians have to communicate with the Georgian speaking population on everyday, professional or mundane levels (Kachkachishvili, 2013, #2, 83. 86-89).

The Armenians, as a rule, also know Russian which makes them trilingual. Not knowing Georgian well enough is one of the major factors for emigration of Armenians from Georgia abroad. Armenians see the prospect of their employment in Russia, which gives them opportunities to support their families in Georgia. Some Armenians go to their historical motherland and find some work there although Armenia also experiences quite a few problems in economics. Due to this, the number of people moving to Russia is higher.

In Samtkhe–Javakheti the major sources of information for the Armenian population are Armenian and Russian TV channels. There are also several regional tele companies as well and several Armenian, Russian and Georgian TV channels are broadcast. However, the majority of participants of the research do not watch Georgian TV

Channels, cannot read Georgian papers and what is more important, express their dissatisfaction regarding the standards of teaching Georgian in the region.

Local newspapers are printed in the region at certain periodicity. In Tbilisi, since the Soviet time, the newspaper 'The Vrastan' is printed although the degree of its efficiency is very low (Kachkachishvili, 2013, #2, pp. 96-97).

Armenian schools in Georgia play an important role in retaining the ethnic and linguistic uniqueness of this group. However, the process of teaching a state language is still to be settled which certainly impedes the integration of the Armenian population of the region into Georgia.

### **Minor Language densely populated groups**

Besides the above-mentioned major linguistic minorities there are several densely populated groups in Georgia which, due to the peculiarity of their state, must be discussed separately. These are: Udi, Kist and Batsb languages (all three belong to Iberian-Caucasian family of languages).

### **The Udi Language**

The Udi language is an endangered language. The fact that it is believed to be developed from the Caucasian Albanian language, makes Udi unique.

The Udi language belongs to the Lezgian branch of the Dagestan group of Iberian Caucasian languages. It possesses two dialects: Nidzh and Vartashen.

To the Udi alphabet (or Albanian) are ascribed unread inscriptions found in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Dagestan. Currently Udi is a language without an alphabet. By the 1920s this language acquired an alphabet. In 1934 a reader by Tevdore Jeiranashvili was published and was used by 1945. The Udis moved to Georgia in 1920 - 1922 after the Armenian and Azeri conflict which went beyond the national frames and turned into religious intolerance. This made the Udi leave their motherland (old Caucasian Albania) and move to the Kvareli district. First they settled 7 kilometers from Kvareli, at the foot of the mountain, in a humid place called Chantliskure (now the village Chantliskure). Later by the initiative of their leader Zinobi Silik (Silikashvili), they moved a kilometre to the East and built the village of Zinobiani (Oktomberi).

It is supposed that historically, the Udis were bilingual. The Udi language was considerably influenced by the Azeri language. The Udins living in Azerbaijan are fluent in both, Azeri and their native language. The Udins living in Georgia are also bilingual and have an excellent command of Georgian which is, in most cases, used as a means of communication. In a house, specially built as a chapel (they do not have a church yet) they pray in Georgian.

The level of the command of the Udi language is determined by the age of the Udis. The older generation is fluent in both languages. Middle aged Udis are better at Georgian whereas school children and young children but for rare exceptions cannot speak the Udi language at all.

### **The Circassian Language**

**(The speech code of Pankisi Kistis -Kist dialect)**

Kists live in Pankisi gorge, district of Akhmeta, Georgia. Pankisi gorge which is made up by the river Alazani is situated at the Northwest border of Kakheti region. The number of these people is up to 6,000. A small number of Kists lives in Chechnya.

Kist is a mixed dialect made up by Circassian dialects: Maisturi, Akhiuri, Khildikharouli, Mitkhouri and Hacharouli. Consequently, it belongs to the Vainakh subgroup of the Iberian-Caucasian language family.

Together with the Kist language, all the Kists speak Georgian and are thus bilingual. The majority of them consider Kist to be their native language. In their families they use Kist and Georgian equally frequently. Toasts are proposed in Georgian during feasts and the institution of a toastmaster is also Georgian.

The Kists cannot speak literary Circassian although they still manage to communicate with Circassians and in order to make this process easier for the Circassians, they try to limit the usage of words borrowed from Georgian. Therefore, they do not have a problem of understanding and making themselves understood. Kists correspond in Georgian as the language of tuition is Georgian and thus, their reading and writing skills are developed in Georgian. Kist language is used only in oral speech.

### **The Tsova-Tush (Batsb) language**

Tsova-Tushis or Batsb people identify themselves with Ethnic Georgians although their language belongs to the Vainkh subgroup of Iberian-Caucasian languages.

These people are bilingual and fluent in both spoken languages, Georgian as well as Batsb.

The question is what is the balance between the degree of knowledge of Georgian on the one hand and Tsova-Tush, on the other. Or in other words, do the Tsova-Tushes command both of the languages equally well or does one of them occupy a dominant position?

According to the research conducted in the project it became obvious that middle-aged and young Tsova-Tushes can easily switch over from one language to another without any obvious problems depending on which word is remembered more easily in the context. It is interesting to note the psychological attitude of the speaker. The speakers don't feel an alien linguistic environment while switching from one language to the other. Quite frequently, parts of a sentence are delivered in Georgian whereas the other part is in Batsb. The linguistic fragments of the systems of the

two languages are so well connected in one syntactic unit that they are perceived as one linguistic unit

Obviously, the linguistic community of Tsova-Tush is characterised by uniform, ideal and adequate bilingualism, which makes an interesting material regarding the research of the fundamentals of language interference and convergence.

### **Groups of dispersive settlements**

#### **The Russian language**

Russian is a representative of the East Slavonic subgroup of Indo-European languages with an alphabet based on Kirilitsa.

Russians constitute the core population of the Russian Federation. Like Ukrainians and Belorussians, they are descendants of Old Russian people (9<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries), which was formed by Eastern Slav tribes, around Kiev, in the process of establishing the old Russian state (Kiev Russia).

According to the census data 2002, Russians make up 1.5% of the whole population of the country. Now their number is even lower as they have returned to their historical motherland.

During the Soviet Union the Russian language was the main language of

communication between ethnic groups. Considering Russian as a priority language, the Russian population did not have the need of learning Georgian. However, after Georgia regained independence, Russia lost its dominant position. Although it still remains a communicative language between ethnic groups in Georgia, its diminishing role gives an additional incentive to the Russian youth remaining in Georgia to emigrate.

After 1991 Russian children born in Georgia went to Russian schools as their parents did not trust the local educational standards and hoped that Russian education would increase their chances to find a job in Russia. Another reason for taking children to Russian schools was a weak knowledge of Georgian. In the 2003 - 2004 academic year there were 168 Russian schools in Georgia of which 55 were monolingual whereas the remaining schools were bilingual and trilingual (together with Russian, the languages of tuition were Azeri and Georgian). However, the number of Russian schools is decreasing together with the Russian speaking population. It is also worth mentioning that currently not Russians, but the representatives of other ethnic groups

make up a significant number of pupils in Russian schools.

Russians continue living in monolingual conditions as in the Soviet Union they did not have a need to learn other languages (in this case, Georgian), especially, as the Russians mentioned themselves, Georgians always tried to talk Russian with them. Thus, monolingualism is the main form of speech function for Russians living in Georgia.

### **The Ukrainian Language**

The Ukrainians speak the Ukrainian language which belongs to the group of East Slavonic languages.

Ukrainians are the core population of Ukraine, but a certain number of them live in Russia, USA, Europe and so on.

According to the census of 2002 of the Georgian population, there are 7,039 Ukrainians living in Georgia half of which live in Tbilisi whereas many of them live in Ajara.

The Government started to work on preserving the Ukrainian language only on September 1, 1999, when the Ukrainian school after Mickheil Grushevski opened in Tbilisi. The Majority of school children come from mixed Georgian - Ukrainian families.



The school children get a primary education in Ukrainian. In high forms they learn Ukrainian language and literature. The younger generation speaks Georgian better although they get education in Russian or Georgian schools and they stay in Georgia or go to Ukraine for their tertiary education.

Ukraine provides scholarships to 10 students from Georgia each year to study in Ukrainian Universities.

The Association of Ukrainians living in Georgia, founded on July 15, 1992 plays an active role in the preservation of national uniqueness of Ukrainians. Mikhail Boris has been in charge of the association since 1994. Since 1995 in the territories with compact Ukrainian settlements Ukrainian societies are created.

### **The Polish Language**

The Polish language belongs to the East Slavic group of languages of the Indo European family. Unfortunately, a great part of the Polish people living in Georgia have forgotten their national language as there were no Polish schools and young people mostly got their education in Russian schools.

The Polish population does not exceed 2,000 people and thus they do not make even one per cent of the whole population. Most of these people are assimilated and live both in Eastern and Western Georgia (Guria-Ajara). The majority of them live in Tbilisi where they have established a Polish diaspora and teach young Polish people their language, culture and traditions .

The Polish people gather in the Catholic church and attend masses. This is one of the most favourite places for them to meet.

### **The Greek Language**

The Greek language is a mother tongue for Greek and Cypriots and belongs to the Greek group of Indo-European languages. The Greek language was first testified 3,500 years ago and is mostly spread in the Balkan peninsula, islands around it and partly in Bulgaria, Albania and Turkey.

The Greeks living in Georgia are mostly the so- called Pontic Greeks (speaking the Pontic dialect) who moved from the Eastern provinces of Turkey. Their first settlements appeared in Georgia in the 18th century. This dialect was spoken in the following villages: Santa, Neokharaba, Gumbat, Tarson (Tsalka district), Sakire, Gora (Dmanisi

district), Ivanovka, Big Iraga, Small Iraga, Jigrashen, Vizirovka, part of Alekseevka (Tetrtskaro district), Michaeltsminda (Akhaltikhe district), Tsikhisjvari (Borjomi district). The dialect is also spoken in Abkhazia and Ajara. The majority of the Greek population living in Tsalka district are Urums ( Turkish speaking Greeks) who, although they do not speak Greek, still identify themselves with the Greek ethnos: one national group makes up two qualitative variants and the ethnic picture does not coincide with the linguistic picture.

The Greeks lived in the villages of Khadiki, Guniakala, Takkilisa, Edikilisa, Tsintskaro, Jinisi, Avranlo, Khando, Beshtasheni, Baiburti, Bashkovi, Livadi, Karakomi, Olinkai. The Urums also lived in the following villages of Dmanisi district : Sarkineti, Ganakhleba, Velispiri and Tsintkaro (Tetrtskaro district).

The term 'Urum' appeared after the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire and conquest of the ex-Byzantine provinces by Turkey. The term comes from the Latin stem 'Roma' meaning Roman, or the subject of Eastern Roman Empire. This term also applied to the population living in the provinces conquered

by Turkey without specifying their ethnic origin.

For Greeks, Georgians, Azeris and Armenians languages of communication are Russians and Turkish. Greeks living in Tsalka regions cannot speak Georgian as starting from the period of the Soviet Union the standards of teaching Georgian as well as motivation has been quite low. Unlike the above-mentioned regions, Greeks living in Tbilisi and other regions of Georgia have a certain knowledge of Georgian though their communication language is still Russian. Due to not knowing the state language, the Greeks living in the regions of Georgian are kept in informational isolation and, what is more important, this hampers their full integration into the social and political life of the country. As well as this, the younger generation considers the social-economic and political situation in the region not promising and thus reveals less enthusiasm to learn Georgian.

### **The Kurdish Language**

The Kurdish language belongs to the Northwestern group of Iranian languages of the Indo - European family .

Kurds (who call themselves Kurmanjis) are one of the ancient people in Western Asia. They live in Iran, Turkey, Syria, Iraq (Kurds refer to this territory as Kurdistan), Libyan, Afganistan, ex-Soviet Republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakstan, Turkmenistan). Their ethnogenesis comes from ancient Median and Iranian tribes.

According to the census of the Georgian population in 2002, 843 Kurds live in Georgia (19.2% of which live in Tbilisi) which makes up 0.4% of the whole population. The majority of Kurds live in Tbilisi, Rustavi, Batumi and Telavi. Kurds are settled in the outskirts of Tbilisi, namely in Gldani, Varketili and the Third Massive as well as in the above-mentioned cities. However, the most densely populated area is still in the suburbs of Tbilisi.

Kurds are one of the most ancient populations in Georgia. Iezidis and Kurds belong to the same tribe although differ in religious confession. Intensive settlement of the Kurds in Georgia started in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They mostly settled in the South Georgian region, Tbilisi, Kakheti and in the villages around Telavi.

Kurds who live in Tbilisi refer to themselves as Iezides and separate

themselves from Kurds (sometimes Iezides even look down at Kurds).

Kurds are fluent in Kurdish, Georgian, Armenian, Russian and one of the European languages (English, German, French).

Kurds could speak Russian better as they usually got education in Russian. At that time Russian was widely spread and was considered to be a priority language among ethnic minorities of Georgia (and not only among them). Currently, Kurds living in Tbilisi go to Georgian schools.

The families which were educated in Georgian, speak Georgian and Kurdish at home whereas those who got their education in Russian, speak Russian and Kurdish.

The older generation speaks mostly Kurdish at home.

### **The Assyrian language**

The Assyrian (Syriac) language denotes the modern Assyrian Neo-Aramaic (Semitic language group) dialects spoken by Assyrians.

Assyrians make up 0.1 % of the population of Georgia. Their number exceeds 3,200. They live in Western Georgia, namely, in Imereti, Guria and Ajara. Syrians or Assyrians are concentrated in Kanda (Kaspi district) which is called Dzveli (Old) Kanda

to differentiate it from the village of Kanda (situated 3 kilometres away and inhabited by Georgians). During the Russian - Iranian war in 1874-1875, Assyrians left Iran (Urmia, village of Nazi) because of the pressure from Iranians (as claimed by the Assyrians themselves).

Among Assyrians the Assyrian language is still spoken at home although Georgian prevails. As the language of TV, radio and press is Georgian, the Assyrians do not have

any access to Assyrian information sources. Thus, Georgian prevails although these people live in classic bilingual conditions. Traditions (wedding receptions, funerals or other rituals) are close to Georgian.

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In the territory of Georgia there are several scores of other dispersively settled linguistic groups. However, I did not discuss them due to the limited format of the article.

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