

*Ramaz Kurdadze*

*Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia*

## **Kartvelian vocabulary as an intangible cultural heritage and Georgian-Megrelian-Laz-Svan-English dictionary**

### **Abstract**

The given paper discusses the significance of Kartvelian languages (Georgian, Megrelian, Laz, Svan) from the point of view of the intangible cultural heritage. It states, that Kartvelian vocabulary similarly to the general vocabulary depicts the life, historic-ethnographic reality, material culture and national worldview of a lingual community. I believe, that for the purpose of the illustration of the above mentioned, the vocabulary of Kartvelian languages must be presented synchronically. This process will vividly reveal the above given problematics and a genetic kinship of Kartvelian languages. For the purpose of the achievement of all these goals together with my colleagues I created the dictionary, which united vocabulary of Kartvelian languages and presented its translation in one of the European languages. The dictionary entitled “Georgian-Megrelian-Laz-Svan-English Dictionary” was created in Tbilisi in 2015. The given article presents the theoretic bases of the systematization of the data of Kartvelian languages. Moreover, it discusses the objectives and tasks of newly-published “Georgian- Megrelian-Laz-Svan-English Dictionary”.

**Keywords:** *Kartvelian, vocabulary, cultural, heritage, dictionary*

The language is a very interesting phenomenon from the point of view of intangible cultural heritage. Expression of a person's qualities and aspirations, as well as the perception of the Universe is carried

out via the language, more specifically, by means of vocabulary. The lexical system of the language reflects the lifestyle of a language community, historical and ethnographic reality, material and spiritual

culture. In this respect, none of the other sources is able to replace lexical parameters of the language.

This paper makes an attempt to present an intangible cultural heritage through the Kartvelian lexical system. The Kartvelian languages: Georgian, Megrelian, Laz, Svan are extremely interesting from linguistic as well as from sociolinguistic and socio-cultural points of view. Georgian is a language of tuition and church ceremonies for the Kartvelian tribes, with the history of 16 centuries. Such kind of inter-relationship and functional division bound and united Kartvelian tribes, as besides Georgians, Kartvelian tribes (not possessing formal alphabetical systems) also took part in the development of the Georgian literary language and its lexical system. In reality, this was an expression of a unified national worldview.

In order to illustrate this unified national line, a dictionary was compiled on the basis of five languages: 4 Kartvelian languages: Georgian, Megrelian, Laz, Svan on the one hand and English, on the other. Uniqueness and specificity of this dictionary is expressed by the fact that the lexical systems of the Kartvelian languages are united in this dictionary on the basis of translation. This approach simplifies the perception of the unity of

these languages, as well as reveals the dynamic processes characterising language development or tendencies on the synchronic level, which are expressed by both core and borrowed lexis. In this dictionary comprising five languages the lexical units of the Kartvelian languages are defined in English. More specifically, the translation of the Georgian index is presented in English, which will promote Georgian language abroad, together with other Kartvelian languages, not possessing formal alphabets.

The idea regarding compilation and release of the dictionary was conceived and carried out on the basis of the Institute of the Georgian language, at the Faculty of Humanities, in Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. The process of preparation and publishing was supported by the Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia and the Swiss Cooperation Office in the South Caucasus.

The data were arranged into the following groups, based on the aims and tasks of the dictionary:

- **Main lexical fund:** terms of kinship, parts of the body, adjectives (including colour terms), numerals, pronouns, endemic flora and fauna, names of celestial bodies, lexical items characterising

time (names of months, weekdays, seasons, etc);

- **Most widely spread verb forms and the participles derived from them:** movement, possession-ownership, existence, eating and drinking;
- **Fruit and vegetable names;**
- **Religious terms;**
- **Adverbs of all groups - of time, place, etc;**
- **Lexical items denoting farming and routine, etc.**

As mentioned above, the main aim of publishing such a dictionary is to reveal:

- **common-Kartvelian worldview shared by all of the Kartvelian languages,**
- **dynamics of a language (resp. languages) development on the synchronic level.**

Both phenomenon, most of all, are expressed in the lexical system of the language and presents not only core but also, the borrowed lexis. It is also worth noting that in this dictionary, the etymology of those borrowings, which were introduced into the lexical systems of the Kartvelian languages long ago, is not denoted. For instance: Greek *moros* “*moros*” which entered the Megrelian

language as *ბოროს* “*boros*” and means *silly, stupid*. With regard more later borrowings, the “lending” language is denoted, even in those cases, when the lexeme is not possessed by the particular language. i.e. Laz *ზამანი* “*zamani*” – *time, which* is originally an Arabic word but entered the Georgian language through Turkish. By providing such indications, we emphasise the language influencing any of the Kartvelian languages.

Now, let us go back to the issue of reflecting / revealing unified worldview of the Kartvelian tribes which will be illustrated on the example of the universal concept-**time**, which is a manifestation of a human being's cognition. Thus its differentiation is based on the movement of celestial bodies. Clearly, complete analysis of the collocations, made up by celestial bodies in the Kartvelian languages which denote a certain moment of time is not the goal of this research. However, I will name several lexical units, which reveal regular correspondences in the Kartvelian languages,

- **Names of celestial bodies:**

(1) Georgian *მზე* “*mze*”, Megr. *ბჟა* “*bža*”, Laz *მჟურა* “*mžura*”, *ბჟა* “*bža*”, Svan *მიჟ* “*miž*” – **sun**

Megr. ჯაშხა “*žas<sup>h</sup>xa*” (< “*bžas<sup>h</sup> dya*”), denoting the day of the Sun = Sunday.

Laz მჟაჩხა “*mžac<sup>h</sup>xa*” (< \**mžas<sup>h</sup> dya*), also denoting the day of the Sun = Sunday

Svan მიჟლადელ “*miž-ladey*”, denoting: the day of the Sun = Sunday (See:

Quinquelingual dictionary, 2015, 146; 128; Sarjveladze, Fenrikh, 1990, 216-217).

(2) Georgian ცისკრის ვარსკვლავი “*cisk’ris varsk’vlavi*”, Megr. გუმათანე “*gumat<sup>h</sup>ane*”, Laz თანურა “*t<sup>h</sup>anura*”, Svan მღრჰილ “*m<sup>h</sup>ril*” – morning star.

It is not accidental that the words denoting the Moon and the month in the Kartvelian languages are presented with the same root and stem as one round of the Moon takes 4 weeks, or a month, for example old Georgian მ-თოვ -არე “*m-t<sup>h</sup>ov-are*”, current Georgian მ -თვ -არე “*m-t<sup>h</sup>v-are*” the Moon and old Georgian თთჰე “*t<sup>h</sup>t<sup>h</sup>ue*”, current Georgian თვე “*t<sup>h</sup>ve*” the month (*t<sup>h</sup>ov*→*t<sup>h</sup>v* and *t<sup>h</sup>t<sup>h</sup>ue*→*t<sup>h</sup>ve* are the same roots). Even more in Megrelian language one and the same lexical unit denotes both the Moon as well as the month: თუთა “*t<sup>h</sup>ut<sup>h</sup>a*”: 1. The Moon, 2. A month.

Revealing a mixed system, names of months in the Kartvelian languages present a very interesting linguistic issue. Specifically, three layers of the system can be singled out:

**1. Roman** which is common for all four Kartvelian languages and which were originally introduced from Georgian. This concept is also expressed by similar names in all the Kartvelian languages: i.e. Georgian მარტი “*mart’i*”, Megrelian მარტი “*mart’i*”, Laz მარტი “*marti*”, Svan მარტი “*mart’i*” – **March**. The same pattern is followed by **April, May, August**, etc.

*Note: Megrelian and Laz are characterised by the phonetic transformation of borrowed lexical items. Compare Megr. მესი “mesi” – May which presents a phonetically transformed variety of მასი “maisi”: მასი “maisi” > \*მეისი “meisi” > მეესი “meesi” // მესი “mesi”. In Laz August is testified by the following word-forms: აღუსთოზი “*ayustozi*” / აღუსტე “*ayuste*” (Tandilava, 2013, 40), აგუსთე “*aguste*” (ibid 11).*

**2. Names of months of the Christian origin:** Georgian გიორგობისთვე “*giorgobist<sup>h</sup>ve*”, Megr., გერგებათუთა “*gergebat<sup>h</sup>ut<sup>h</sup>a*”, Svan

გიორგობ “giorgob” / ლიგიერგი  
“ligiergi”, the month of saint Giorgi, saint  
George – **November**.

*Note: In Georgian November takes its  
name from the Roman calendar whereas in  
Megrelian and Svan it is denoted by  
Christological term, and in Laz a lexical  
unit from folk etymology მწილუს  
(Quinquelingual dictionary, 2015, 62;  
175). მწილუს “mc’ilua” – harvest.  
Compare: Megrelian მოწია “moc’ia”–  
autumn, which also means harvesting.*

**3. Folk terms:** It is worth noting that  
folk terms are connected with farming in  
Kartvelian languages - in Georgian, in  
Megrelian and in Laz.

In Georgian October –  
ღვინობისთვე “*gvinobist’ve*” is  
connected with farming, exactly means  
wine making month. This is compound  
word that contains two words: ღვინობის  
“*gvinobis*” – something connected to the  
wine and თვე “*t’ve*” month. It is  
corresponded by Megrelian გიმათუთა  
“*gimat’ut’a*” and Laz ტახუს “*t’axua*”  
both terms used with harvesting of yellow  
corn. Megrelian გიმათუთა “*gimat’ut’a*”  
is compound word, in which the first part  
is გიმუს “*gimua*” – foxtail millet corns  
harvesting time and the second part is  
თუთა “*t’ut’a*”–month. While Laz ტახუს

“*t’axua*” means yellow corn *breaking*  
time. Foxtail millet was so widely spread  
in Megrelia that it even gave the name to  
one of the months – October, although the  
culture of foxtail millet is no longer  
observed in Megrelia.

The dynamic nature of the language  
development is best seen while contrasting  
it to other languages. This kind of  
interrelationship and influence is most  
reflected by the lexical system of the  
language. Things change and, lexical units  
also follow the change. There is no  
language without any influence from  
outside. Even languages without any  
formal alphabet can be influenced by a  
related as well as unrelated languages  
which is not surprising.

As for the trace of the foreign words  
in the Kartvelian, it is a well-known fact  
that in old Georgian a subject denoting a  
small, low table ტაბლა “*t’abla*” is  
corresponded by Megrelian ტაბაკო  
“*t’abak’i*”, Svan გლრჯ ნბ “*gərjāb*”,  
ვოჩქ “*p’ic’ik’*”, there is attested also  
Russian word სტოლ “*st’ol*” in Svan.

What does the dynamic process of the  
language reveal? In Georgian ტაბლა  
“*t’abla*” was replaced by მაგიდა  
“*magida*”. First of all, I argue that the  
substituted subject was different from the  
original one by shape, size, height, etc. In

such cases, Georgian should have either introduce a new name for this subject, based on its own language data, or borrow it. Georgian borrowed an Arabic word *მაგიდა* “*magida*” – *table* like other Kartvelian languages which also borrowed the words denoting a table. More specifically, Megrelian and Svan borrowed the word *სტოლი* “*st’ol*”– *table* from Russian. Laz - borrowed the word *მაგიდა* “*magida*” – *table* from Georgian.

Another couple used as an example is *სარკმელი* “*sark’meli*” - *small window* – *ფანჯარა* *p<sup>h</sup>anjara*” - *window* for Georgian. *ფანჯარა* - *p<sup>h</sup>anjara*” *window* differs from *სარკმელი* “*sark’meli*” - *small window* and, naturally, they denote two different things. It is a well-known fact that Georgian borrowed the word *ფანჯარა* - *p<sup>h</sup>anjara*” *window* from Persian. In Megrelian, *ორკე* “*ork’e*” and its synonyms *ოჭკორიე* “*oč’k’orie*”, *ოსინთე* “*osint<sup>h</sup>e*” // *სასინთო* “*sasint<sup>h</sup>o*” etc are defined in all relevant dictionaries (By Kajaia, Kobalia, Pipia and others) as an opening, through which light enters and smoke leaves (Kajaia, 2002, 468; Pipia, 2008, 36; Kobalia, 2010, 545; 557; 584). Thus none of these words are equivalents to *ფანჯარა p<sup>h</sup>anjara*” - *window*. In order to denote this concept, Megrelian

borrowed *აკოშკა* “*ak’osh’k’a*” – *window* from Russian, Laz uses the Persian word *ფენჯერე* “*phenjere*” – *window*, whereas Svan *ლაჯვრა* “*laq<sup>h</sup>vra*”, which is translated as a hole.

Arguably, the word *ლაჯვრა* “*laq<sup>h</sup>vra*” is still employed in Svan due to the existence of Svan towers although a Russian word *აკოშკა* “*ak’osh’k’a*” – *window* is also attested in Balskvemouri sub-dialect of the Svan language.

The words *სტოლი* “*st’oli*” – *table*, *აკოშკა* “*ak’osh’k’a*” – *window* are classed to be barbarisms in literary Georgian while in a language without an independent alphabet, they are based on spontaneous speech acts and employed as ordinal lexical units while communicating as well as while creating examples of folklore.

Religious vocabulary of the Kartvelian languages expresses Christian worldview and is closely connected with the national worldview. Moreover, they overlap. The comparison of the data of the Kartvelian languages revealed both the traces of the pagan times and cultural connections as well as the extent of the role and influence of a literary language.

As the language of tuition and church ceremonies for all of the Kartvelian tribes was Georgian it was expected that religious vocabulary in all these languages

would be based on the Georgian language. However, the following layers of lexical units were revealed by the present research:

**Pagan lexical items which later must have acquired Christian colouring:**

Georgian, Svan *ბზობა* “*bzoba*”; Megr. *ბაიობა* “*baioba*”, the latter goes to the pagan times, Laz *ჩიმჩირიში ნდღა* “*chimchirishi ndya*”, – **Palm Sunday**. In Georgian and other Kartvelian languages there is used box tree instead of Palm, therefore the Kartvelian term is *Box tree Sunday* instead of *Palm Sunday*. In Laz *ჩიმჩირიში ნდღა* “*chimchirishi ndya*” the first word (*ჩიმჩირიში* “*chimchirishi*”) is borrowed from Turkish, translated as *ბზა* “*bza*” – *box (tree)*.

In the Georgian word *ნათლობა* “*natloba*”- *christening*, is connected with the cult of light, though this word has acquired a new meaning. In this aspect, Megrelian *ნათუა* “*natua*” – “*christening*”, borrowed from Georgian follows the semantics of the Georgian word. However, Georgian *ნათლია* “*natlia*” – *godmother / godfather* differs from Megrelian *მორდია* “*mordia*” – *godmother / godfather* which clearly goes back to the pagan word *მორდუობა*

“*morduoba*” - *boy's tutoring*. The tradition of *მორდუობა* “*morduoba*” - *boy's tutoring* was spread from ancient times in many parts of Georgia, especially it was very frequent in Megrelia.

In Megrelian the pagan cult is revealed in the name of Easter which in Megrelian is *თანგვა* “*tanap'a*”, meaning lightening; As for the Georgian *აღდგობა* “*aydgoma*”, it is created according to the Greek word *ანასტასიოს* “*anast'asios*” and Christological meaning is derived.

**Christianity terms of purely Georgian origin** increase the role and functions of the Georgian literary language. A special group is created by those lexical units which are transposed, without any changes, from Georgian into other Kartvelian languages:

*სახარება* “*saxareba*” - *gospel*, *ბიბლია* “*biblia*” - *Bible*, *ჯვარი* “*jvari*” – *cross* ( = Laz-Turkish *ხაჩი* “*xachi*”), *ხატი* “*xati*” – *icon*.

The following lexical items undergo a phonetic transformation: Georgian *პეტრე-პავლობა* “*p'et're - p'avloba*”, Megrelian *პერტობა* “*p'ertoba*”, Svan *პირპოლქდინშ* “*pärpol[d]jüş*” – **Feast Saints Peter and Paul**; Georgian *მთავარანგელოზი* “*mt'avarangelozi*”,

Megrelian *თარანგიოზი* “*tʰarangiozi*”,  
Svan *თარინგზელ* “*tʰāringzel*” -  
*archangel* (Quinquelingual dictionary,  
2015, 146).

It is also interesting to note how the  
community differentiates religious terms  
and items employed in everyday life, for  
example: Georgian *მხარებელი*  
“*maxarebeli*” as a religious term),  
Megrelian *მხარებელი* “*maxarebeli*”,  
Svan *მხარ Nბ* “*māxärb*” – *Evangelist*  
(The Laz Language does not represent  
religious term of Evangelist). Compare

Georgian *მხარობელი* “*maxarobeli*”,  
Megrelian *მხარია* “*maxaria*”, Laz  
*მხელებუ* “*mxelebu*”, Svan *მხენე*  
“*maxene*” - smb. who tells good news,  
(Quinquelingual dictionary, 2015, 142).

To sum up, it can be concluded that  
the Kartvelian lexical system classed as a  
intangible cultural heritage reflects and  
expresses not only common Kartvelian  
data, but also, borrowed items. Both of the  
layers are presented in Georgian-  
Megrelian-Laz-Svan-English dictionary.

## References:

- Kajaia, 2002 – O. Kajaia, *Megrelian Georgian Dictionary, volume II*, Publishing House, “NEKERI”, Tbilisi 2002.
- Kobalia – A. Kobalia, *Megrelian Dictionary*, Publishing House, “ARTANUJI”, Tbilisi, 2010.
- Pipia, 2008 – D. Pipia, *Megrelian Vocabulary Materials*, Kolkhian Series 3, Publishing House “ARTANUJI”, Tbilisi, 2008.
- Quinquelingual dictionary, 2015 – *Georgian-Megrelian-Laz-Svan English Dictionary*, Compilers: R. Kurdadze, D. Shonia, L. Tandilava, L. Nizharadze. The English version was prepared by T. Gelashvili. Experts: M. Lomia, O. Memishishi, K. Margiani-Subari, Editor of the Georgian and Kartvelian parts Z. Chumburidze, Editor of the English part Irina Gvelesiani, Publishing House „PETITI“, Tbilisi, 2015 (For the pdf version of the dictionary see: [https://tsu.ge/data/image\\_db\\_innova/GEORGIAN-MEGRELIAN-LAZ-SVAN-ENGLISH%20DICTIONARY.pdf](https://tsu.ge/data/image_db_innova/GEORGIAN-MEGRELIAN-LAZ-SVAN-ENGLISH%20DICTIONARY.pdf))
- Sarjveladze, Fenrikh, 1990 – Heinz Fähnrich, Zurab Sarjveladze, *Etymological Dictionary of Kartvelian Languages*, (in Georgian), Tbilisi State University Publishing House, 1990.
- Tandilava, 2013 – A. Tandilava, *Laz Dictionary*, Publishing House “SAARI”, Tbilisi. 2013.