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The Discussion on the Status of the Russian Language in Georgian Schools

(on the basis of the Imereti press of the beginning of XX century)¹

Abstract

The research of the sociolinguistic picture of Imereti according to the Imereti press of the 10-20s of XX century is among the issues which have not been studied yet. After the abolition of the statehood of Georgia in 1801 the Georgian language became part of the language policy of the Russian Empire. As a result, the Russian government abolished the liturgy and the teaching process in the Georgian language, ethnic and national conflicts were provoked between the inhabitants of the territory of Georgia, etc. Pursuant to the circular issued in 1885 the Georgian language was completely removed from the syllabuses. In parallel with this anti-national policy a number of journals and newspapers were started. Covered Russia's assimilative linguistic or ethnic policy and contributed to national mobilization. It will be the first sociolinguistic analysis of the periodical publications in two directions: a. The issue of the distribution and knowledge of the Georgian language in the region (including the issue of gender). b. The problem of functioning of the Georgian language in the education (secular and theological) system.

Keywords: *the Georgian Language, the Russian Language, the Imereti Press, Language Situation, Sociolinguistics*

Along with a number of other cases confirmed in the history of Georgia, the language issue has become much more

topical since the events taking place in the early 20th century; The extent to which linguistic component was and is presented

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in these events is quite large. The reason for this magnitude was a set of the political processes that began as a result of the aforementioned peripeteias leading to such political and social events that were followed by the creation of new state institutions. Many socio-economic problems had to be resolved in Georgia; language issues occupied one of the leading places among them. It was necessary to study the existing language situation and to carry out an appropriate language policy based on the results obtained. We believe that the topicality of the issue has obviously made politicians as well as scientists realize the necessity of its study. However, before the formation of sociolinguistics as the specialized linguistic discipline focused on language and social relations the study of the language situation and its related problems lacked systematicity and consistency, which was reflected in the absence of adequate methods, common criteria, and in terminological ambiguity; from a scientific standpoint, all of this, of course, led to a biased result. It is hard to say that modern sociolinguistics has solved all these intra-disciplinary methodological problems, but it is a fact that the proper conceptual apparatus and the system of the corresponding terms have already been clearly established. There are several,

qualitatively different, but complementary approaches, etc.

The growth of scientific (and not only scientific) interest in the problem of a language situation was caused by realizing the fact, that the language factor plays a very important role both in the life of a single state and in international relations. Language policy has become an integral part of the common policy of each country. In order to properly define the directions of the language policy for a given country, it is necessary to adequately study the linguistic situation of that country, in particular, of Georgia (Chachanidze 2005, 3). M. Tabidze notes that “the following factors influenced the major trends in the language policy:

1. When did different languages meet in the area?

2. To what extent are the languages that meet different or related?

3. Which language prevailed: autochthonous or a foreign one?

4. What is the ratio between the "guest" (foreign) and "host" (local) cultures?

5. What stages did the autochthonous population go through on the path of state arrangement and to what extent did another state interfere in its political and economic life?

6. To what extent did the ethnoculture impact the "guest" (foreign) population and to what extent is it acceptable for its "linguistic awareness" to use the language of the autochthonous population, and vice versa, to what extent did the "guest" (foreign) language influence the "host" (local) one?

7. What degree of bilingualism are we dealing with in the area?

8. Are linguistic contacts peaceful or is there a linguistic conflict?

9. To what extent is the population ready to adopt and use (in all areas of public life) its own or the other language?" (Tabidze 1999).

There are three periods in the development of the Georgian literary language: the Old Georgian Language (V-XI cc); the Middle Georgian Language (XII-XVIII cc); the New Georgian Language (XIX-XX cc) (Shanidze 1953). In terms of the norms of the Georgian literary language, every epoch has its say. Moreover, the epoch socially and politically directs different aspects of the language situation of that period. The sociolinguistic picture of the 10-20s of the 20th century is one of the most acute periods accompanied by never-ending disputes, and that is why, it may be referred to as "a micro-epoch".

The revival of the Georgian literary language at the beginning of the 20th century is connected with the foundation of the Georgian University, one of the major goals of which was to expand the range of functioning of the Georgian language. This is what Besarion Jorbenadze says: "The revolutionary transformations of life in the 10-20s of the 20th century, the foundation of the Georgian University, the revival of national self-consciousness, the declaration of the Georgian language as a state language opened new doors for the Georgian literary language. The language policy that was previously more or less elemental is already well-planned and scientifically conceptualised" (Jorbenadze 1989, 166).

The aim of the present paper is to examine the sociolinguistic picture of Georgia in the Imereti press of early 20th century; sociolinguistic analysis of the retrieved material, typological research of the linguistic situation, analysis of the issue of the mother tongue in relation to Russian, and identification of the main tendencies of educational policy.

The main trends of the epoch to be analysed will be revealed using the sociolinguistic method. In particular, the language situation and its related models, the issue of mother tongue and the main problems of educational policy will be

described. In addition, one of the main objectives of the study is to review the policy of Russification using the analysis method.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century the Imereti press was particularly focused on the issues of functioning of the Georgian language in Imereti.

After the abolition of the statehood of Georgia in 1801 the Georgian language became part of the linguistic policy of the Russian Empire. As a result, the Russian government abolished the liturgy and the teaching process in the Georgian language, ethnic and national conflicts were provoked between the inhabitants of the territory of Georgia, etc. In 1881, the supervisor of the Caucasian Educational District K. Ianovsky issued a circular, which declared the Russian language to be a compulsory subject from the primary level of any kind of schools, whereas the mother language was declared non-compulsory. In 1885, pursuant to the second circular, the Georgian language was completely removed from the syllabuses (Tavzishvili 1948). Teaching of the Georgian theological and secular literature was banned in the theological seminary. Under the order of the Exarch, Georgian teachers

were dismissed from theological schools. By the beginning of 20th century the Tsarist regime had entirely removed the Georgian language from public schools.

In parallel with this anti-national policy, at the expense of self-sacrifice Georgian intellectuals started to take a number of measures, more specifically, in 1879 the Literacy Society was established. At the initiative of the Society, non-state schools were set up in the Caucasus in every area inhabited by the Georgians and the Georgian Drama Society was founded in 1880. The Society started to issue numerous journals and newspapers.

Hundreds of periodical publications covered Russia's assimilative linguistic or ethnic policy and contributed to national mobilization. Obviously, it was the most productive phase of "linguistic planning" In this period the cultural life of Imereti, more specifically of Kutaisi, was characterized by a significant expansion of publishing activities, which was caused by an explicit negative attitude of the Tsarist regime towards this region as the latter was distinguished by a particularly Georgian nature: "In parallel with Tbilisi, literary and publishing activities are rapidly developing in the capital of Imereti – Kutaisi".²

² Kvitsaridze, I. Journal 'Gantiadi' (The Dawn), #6, #25, 1915.

There is an impressive list of periodical publications issued in Kutaisi in the 80s and 90s of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century — newspapers: "Shinauri Sakmeebi" (Home Affairs) — 1908-1915, "Kolkhida" — 1911-1913, "Imereti" — 1912-1915, "Shroma" (Labor) — 1908, "Akaki's Tviuri Krebuli" (Akaki's Monthly Collections) — 1897-1900, "Eri" (The Nation) — 1913-1914, "Samshoblo" (The Homeland) — 1915-1917, "Mtskemi" (The Shepherd) — 1883-1910, "Tskhovreba da Metsniereba" (Life and Science) — 1914, "Poni" (The Background) — 1909-1910, "Khma Kartveli Kalisa" (Voice of a Georgian Woman) — 1917-1918; the journals: "Gantiadi" (The Dawn) — 1913-1915, "Tsisperi Kantsebi" (The Blue Horns) — 1916", etc. Regardless of the nature of the publication, an emphasis was placed on linguistic, educational and religious issues. The material included the questions concerning not only Kutaisi but the entire region of Imereti.

The Imereti press systematically published informational and polemical letters on functioning of the Georgian language, and how the Georgian language was oppressed at the expense of Russian.

To confirm this, we can refer to one of the letters that reads:

*"Here, the Russian culture holds the place of the Georgian one, and acts as its substituent: - a Russian book instead of a Georgian one, a Russian newspaper instead of a Georgian one, a Russian theater, Russian speech instead of Georgian!"*³

Prominent Georgian political figures, writers and publicists actively opposed the forceful use of the Russian language in Georgia, the neglect of national culture and the cruelty of tsarist officials. They tried to develop new views of education in the society, to support schools financially and morally. At their initiative, in 1879, "the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians" was established, which aimed at getting education in the mother tongue in primary schools. One of these figures was a grammarian and publicist Silvan Khundadze, who defended Georgian "Deda Ena" (the primer "Mother Language") in the Imereti press and sharply criticized officials of the Tsarist regime:

"According to Mr. Grozdov's instruction _ the inspector of public schools in Kutaisi Governorate, Georgian children who have just entered the school (the first

³ Newspaper 'Imereti', #116, 1913.

graders) will have the lessons of the Russian language from September; B. Grozdov, as a teacher, probably understands very well that, until a child has learned to read and write in his/her native language, and is not on a close terms with the teacher, thinking and learning in a foreign language from the first day of school is completely anti-pedagogic. But as an official, B. Grozdov probably does not want to understand this, and is eager to serve the government by exceeding the law".⁴

The approach of the Russian linguist and publicist Nikoloz Durnovo (1876-1936) to the issue of the situation of the Georgian language is of a particular interest. He raises his voice in defense of the Georgian Church and language in his famous work entitled "The Issue of Autocephaly of the Georgian Church" („По вопросу о Грузинской церковной автокефалии“). In the work he notes:

"In the hands of the bureaucracy the Georgian school has become a tool for banishing the interests of people. The bureaucracy imposed minor and secondary goals on schools that failed to meet the common state objectives. In any case, the unity and prosperity of the Russian state is more ensured when a Georgian remains to

be a true Georgian, who speaks and thinks in his native language, and not in case when no good basic principles are developed and only the Russian alphabet is taught".⁵

In Georgia, every effort was made to ensure that the liturgy was performed in Russian. Initially, in Georgian churches on weekends and on church holidays, and later on public holidays, in large cities including Kutaisi, liturgy was performed in Russian leaving Georgian clergymen, who couldn't speak Russian, jobless.

In the 70s of the 19th century, the reform of teaching foreign languages was carried out in America. One of its methods was the direct or the natural method of teaching. The direct method was opposed to the grammar-translation method, which preached complete ignorance of grammar rules and gave the main priority to spoken language. The term "direct" refers to the acquisition of a foreign language without the use of a native language as an intermediary language, since according to this concept the native language is perceived to be a barrier when acquiring a foreign language. One of the founders of this method is American linguist Maximilian Berlitz (1852-1921) and it is known as the Berlitz Method (Berlitz 1921). Later, this method reached Russia as

⁴ Newspaper "Imereti", Silovani, #47, 1912.

⁵ Durnovo 1907. *The Issue of Autocephaly of the Georgian Church*, p. 103.

well and, "thanks to" the Tsarist regime, so called "the immersion method" was introduced in various schools of Georgia in order to banish the Georgian language.

The discussion on educational reform and the necessity of teaching Georgian became wide-ranging and covered almost all issues concerning the linguistic situation in Georgia. Kutaisi newspapers: "Imereti", "Shinauri Sakmeebi" (Home Affairs), "Kolkhida", "Mtskemi" (The Shepherd)", etc. systematically published polemical and informative letters on these issues. One of these issues was so called "the immersion method" for the exarchate parochial schools of Georgia approved by the Synod of 1902 which actually meant banishing the Georgian language. On the papers of "Shinauri Sakmeebi" (Home Affairs) we read:

"Levitsky _ Director of public schools of the Kutaisi Governorate, who is fascinated by the idea of Russification based on so called "the immersion method" brainwashed the Georgian youth. Blinded russifiers do not realize that they are fascinated by false and harmful thoughts, that they will never reach their goals as russifying Georgian people in Georgia is absolutely unimaginable, so all their

trouble is flogging a dead horse and nothing more".⁶

In regard to "the immersion method", Durnovo's opinion is also of much interest. In his paper he writes: *"The rejected immersion method should be buried forever with its deceased creator, and a completely new elementary school curriculum should be designed, but it should be developed locally, in Georgia not in St. Petersburg. Only in this case will elementary school serve the common state interest of Georgia and not the bureaucratic ambitious dreams".⁷*

In the work of an American sociolinguist Joshua Fishman "The Earliest Stage of Language Planning" (Fishman 1993, 351) language conflicts and conflict-sensitive situations in different countries (Macedonian, Polish, Dutch, Hebrew, Korean, Belarusian, Ukrainian, etc.) are discussed. It presents various linguistic situations with internal contradictions in different countries, on the basis of which the following trends emerge in the course of a political crisis:

“a) the subconscious recognition of the cultural and linguistic superiority of the country having political influence;

b) intensifying the sense of national self-assertion and protection of the national

⁶ Newspaper 'Shinauri Sakmeebi' (Home Affairs), #13, 1912.

⁷ Durnovo 1907. *The Issue of Autocephaly of the Georgian Church*, p. 112.

language in a much larger part of the society, reflected in the aspiration to improve the normalization of the language and to expand the range of its functioning" (Fishman 1993, 351).

It is noteworthy that the models proposed by Joshua Fishman are a universal way of describing the linguistic situation in Georgia at the beginning of the 20th century. Discussions in the name of protecting the purity of the Georgian language are evident in the publications and correspondences of Georgian public figures, educators, publicists and grammarians printed in the Imereti press of that time.

The discussion on the educational reform that covered the issues of the necessity of teaching Georgian became wide-ranging and brought together almost all issues concerning the linguistic situation in Georgia. In particular, the bilingualism which according to Ch. Ferguson refers to the type of standardization in which two languages in the language community have their own social function (Ferguson 1959, 325-340). In the present paper we cannot bypass the aforementioned phenomenon when studying the problem. Besarion Jorbenadze's approach is also interesting in this respect: *"Bilingualism might have a forceful nature. In the Russian Empire, for example, education in the mother tongue was severely restricted. When they were*

forced to open the schools where teaching was in the mother tongue, everything was geared towards keeping such graduates substantially illiterate. An artificial barrier was created" (Jorbenadze 1997, 28-29).

One of the main tasks of sociolinguistics is to develop an adequate model to describe the given language situation. This means that the developed model should reflect the current situation as realistically as possible. In special literature (Kloss 1966, 1968; Rustow 1968; Stewart 1962, 1968; Ferguson 1962, 1966) there are several attempts of functional classification of the languages and language situation. In the present paper we intend to rely on Charles Ferguson's National Sociolinguistic Profile Formula (National Sociolinguistic Profile Formula (Ferguson 1966).

Initially, Ch. Ferguson divided languages according to their communication value: (a) major language (L maj), (b) minor language (L min), (c) language of special status (L spec). It should be admitted that his criteria are not very strict. This gap can be partially eliminated by considering the second stage. Here five language types are acknowledged: 1) Vernacular (V), 2) Standard (S), 3) Classical (C), 4) Pidgin (hybrid language having one language vocabulary and second language grammar

(P), 5) Creole (hybrid language that has turned into the native) (K). At first glance, it is clear that such a model can only be useful for certain societies. At the third, final stage, the author identifies seven societal functions of the language: 1) Group function (g), 2) Official use(o), 3) Language of wider communication (w), 4) Educational use (e), 5) Religious purposes (r), 6) International use (i), 7) School subject (s).

Considering Ferguson's experience, the formula of a national sociolinguistic profile at the beginning of the 20th century in Georgia is as follows:

**1 L maj (Sg, So, Sr, Ss) + 1 L min
(Co, Ce, Cr, Ci, Cs)**

Where **L** is the language in general, **maj** - the Georgian language, **min** - the Russian language, **S** - the native or the Georgian language, **g** - the Georgian language used in daily communication, **o** - the Russian language used in official business relations, **r** - the language used in religious service. We should admit that Ferguson's model needs some clarification. This is natural, since the universalization of the models of linguistic situation rarely gives us even a slightly accurate picture in such specific cases. Therefore, according to Ferguson's model, from one of the typical areas of language use – the language of religious service (r), it is necessary to

distinguish its two variants **Sr** and **Cr**, as according to Georgian historical sources and press materials, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in Georgia both the Georgian and Russian languages were equally used in religious service.

In this regard, it is important to note the position of V. Avrorin that is as follows: “if we do not find out what are the forms existence with which a language is presented in a situation, and if we do not analyze languages in the framework of their interrelationship, if we do not establish means and domains of language use, if we do not consider the conditions languages are used in, we are not going to be able to have an even slightly complete view of a language situation” (Avrorin 1975, 51).

V. Avrorin was one of the rare Russian sociolinguists of the Soviet era who tried to express the approach to the issues at stake that was far from being nomenclative. That is why his vision is valuable and the parameters offered by him allow us to see a more complete picture. According to Avrorin, the language situation involves the following essential components:

- 1) Social conditions of functioning of the language;
- 2) Areas and environment of its use;
- 3) Forms of language existence;

Avrorin concludes that language functions, forms of language existence,

areas and environment of its use, and the nature of language interaction are the basic concepts of sociolinguistics and are interrelated: “Function is the aim; the form of existence is a kind of tool; the environment is a condition, and the field is the area of using the tool” (Avrorin 1975, 83).

Consequently, according to the Imereti press materials of the early 20th century, based on elaborated models of the linguistic situation the fate of the Georgian language mostly affected the educational field. Several key issues can be identified: a) the issue of the interrelation of the Russian and

Georgian languages; b) the suitability of "the immersion method" prevailing in Georgian schools; c) discussions and statements of public figures reflecting the status of the Russian and Georgian languages, indicating the existence of a targeted language policy of that time. Today the materials featured in the Imereti press of the early 20th century are not only of museum importance but of practical value as well and contain valuable observations and conclusions about meeting the global language policy and maneuvering in it.

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