The Caucasian languages: Nation-building, alphabetization and Soviet language policy
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The gubernii & oblasti of the Caucasus, 1917

The demographic composition of Tsarist administrative units
- Most Caucasian units reflect the history of Russian expansion: some territories acquired by treaty, others by conquest.
- Borders typically conform to pre-Tsarist political entities incorporated into Empire, or river basins (Terek and Kuban)
- Most entities multi-ethnic; many ethnic groups in multiple entities

Official interest in language and ethnicity
- 1830s-50s: rise of military statistics as scientific discipline (especially in military academies) & "population politics" [Holquist]
- In statistical publications from the mid- and late-19th c., populations are primarily classified and counted according to:
  1. Social class (nobility, artisans, various categories of peasants, etc.); profession
  2. Sex and age
  3. Religion
  4. "Nationality" (narodnost') of lesser importance. Usually confined to confessional-language classifications (Georgians, Armenians, "Tatars", Jews, Russians); European nationalities mostly used for foreigners (French, German etc.)
  5. Interestingly, detailed language data only collected for Dagestanian mountaineers, perhaps because it seemed the most scientific way to categorize them

Religion and writing systems in the Russian Empire
- Alphabets reflected the major confessional groupings within the Empire
- Christianization accompanied by the inventing of scripts
- Cyrillic: Slavic Orthodox churches
- Latin: Catholic and Protestant nations (Poles, Balts, Germans)
- Hebrew: Jews (Hebrew, Yiddish)
- Armenian: Gregorian Monophysite
- Georgian: Georgian Orthodoxy
- Mongolian: Buddhist Kalmyks, Buriats
The South Caucasian Republics (1918-1920/1)
- Transcaucasian republics organized on ethnonational principle.
- Georgians and Armenians: especially high level of national consciousness
  - 1. long history of statehood
  - 2. distinctive confessional-linguistic identity (Georgian Orthodoxy, Armenian monophysite, with national liturgical language)
  - 3. long history of literacy & unique alphabets

Language status in the independent republics
- Georgian, Armenian and Azeri proclaimed as official languages — a status they retained after the Soviet invasion
- New Latin-based script promulgated for Azeri in 1919 — foreshadowing shift to Latin script in early Soviet years

The Soviet period, I: 1917-1937
- 1. The RSFSR/USSR as anti-colonial multi-ethnic state: Lenin and Stalin’s nationalities policy
- 2. Written languages for each titular nationality: alphabetization, promotion of Latin-based scripts
- 3. Reformed scripts and new alphabets

Why Lenin & Stalin supported national self-determination
- 1. National consciousness was a necessary phase in the historical path from capitalism to socialist internationalism
- 2. The non-Russian peoples were the victims of Great-Russian colonialism and chauvinism. Minority nationalism is understandable, and less dangerous than Russian nationalism
- 3. Nationalism was an ideological illusion, but a useful one; better that we use it than let them use it against us

Political-territorial categories of the USSR compared to Russian Empire
- multi-layered geopolitical structure
- innovation: creation of ethically-based territories, as well as purely regional ones
- RSFSR maintained concept of Rossijskij supra-ethnic identity, as in Russian Empire
- At USSR level, Russian (Russkij) became “unmarked” nationality, without titular territory.
- Lenin’s inversion of relation between Russians and minorities: “affirmative action empire” (Terry Martin)

The multilayered territorial structure of the USSR
- 1. USSR as a union of republics
- 2. RSFSR (“super-ethnic”: Rossijskaja) & Union Republics (ethnic, with constitution)
- 3a. Autonomous SSRs (ethnic, with constitution)
- 3b. Krai (non-ethnic)
- 3c. Oblast’ (within Union Republic or Krai): Autonomous Ob (ethnic), Ob (non-ethnic)
- 4. Autonomous Okrug (ethnic; within Krai or AObl; mostly in Siberia)
- 5. Rajon (local units, like Tsarist uezd)
Literacy rates at the end of the Tsarist period: 1897 census

- Literacy for the entire empire: 28.4%
- Literacy in component nations:
  - Estonia: 96.2%
  - Russian-speaking lands: 29.6%
  - Georgia: 23.6%
  - Tadjikistan: 2.3%
  - Turkmenistan: 0.85%

Soviet alphabetization policy

- Elimination of illiteracy
- Creation of writing systems for all Soviet minority languages
- Institute instruction in native-language schools
- Publication of textbooks, literature, newspapers, Communist Party materials in native languages

Writing systems for Caucasian languages

- A. [Premodern] Greek, Georgian, “Albanian” or Arabic scripts
- B. [Tsarist period] Modified Cyrillic or Latin scripts formulated by Uslar, Marr and other linguists
- C. [Soviet period to 1928] Arabic script allowed (and even revised) for some North Caucasian languages
- D. [1920s-1938] experimentation with Latin scripts (revision in 1932)
- E. [1938-1991] Cyrillic imposed for all newly-written languages; EXCEPT Georgian script for Abkhazian and (South) Ossetian (until 1954) — i.e. alphabet of titular union nationality adopted
- F. [post-Soviet] Shift to Latin script for some languages; new written standards for Rutul, Aghul

l’alphabet arménien

- créé vers 400 (par St. Mesrop Machtots), après l’adoption du christianisme
- l’ordre des lettres suit celui de l’alphabet grec, avec intercalation de lettres supplémentaires

les alphabets du géorgien ancien

l’inscription alanique de Zelenchuk

- pierre tombale de c. 1000 ap J-C
- texte en langue alanique (vieil-ossète), inscrit en lettres grecques
- lecture et traduction par Vs. Miller
Orthographic reform in early Soviet period (1917-1928)

- “Lunacharskij Phase I”: revision and upgrading of existing writing systems
- Cyrillic reform of Dec 1917
- For East Caucasian languages sporadically written in Arabic characters: development of “new adjam” — improved Arabic orthography (1920)

scripts for Avar

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“Lunacharskij Phase II”: Latinization

- Latin script as universal writing system, to make all languages accessible to international socialist community
- 1921-1932: new Latin-based alphabets for non-literate languages of Central Asia & Caucasus
- 1928: Arabic scripts — too associated with Islam — replaced with Latin
- 1930: Lunacharskij proposes that even Russian itself should be Latinized

Another motivation for Latinization

By supporting [alphabet movements in Azerbaijan and the Caucasus], the party appeared to promote nationalization policy, giving peoples new or revised alphabets designed for mass literacy and education. Yet Latinization also offered Moscow the perfect opportunity to begin to undermine the power of the Muslim clerical establishment ... forcing Latin as the new medium of script literacy, the party would mount an impossibly barrier between traditional Islamic print culture and the masses of the new “Soviet” literates. Since the vast majorities of the Turkic and indigenous populations of the east were still illiterate, control over alphabet politics meant control over them. (Michael G. Smith, quoted in Clement 2005)

- Note that more Azeri speakers live in Iran than in Azerbaijan. They have always written their language in Arabic script.
- In 1925, the Soviets forbade the importation of documents written in Arabic script. In 1928 an attempt was made to confiscate & destroys books in Arabic script.

Latin scripts replacing Arabic for languages of Muslim peoples of USSR

- Poster promoting new Latin script for Uzbek
- Contrast between workers holding new alphabet & waste-heap of mullahs, medresseh teachers and old generation of intellectuals mixed with Arabic letters [Bobrovnikov]
The Late Stalin period: 1937-1953

- Stalin’s rehabilitation of Great-Russian nationalism in the years preceding the war
- 1937-1938: Replacement of Latin alphabets with the scripts of the titular nation: Cyrillic scripts in the RSFSR, Georgian script in Georgia (also abolition of written use of Mingrelian and Laz)
- Debate over the teaching of Russian in non-Russian schools
- Deportation of North Caucasian peoples in 1944

Pruning the list of nationalities and written languages

- Many small-scale ethno-territorial units abolished in early 1930s.
- Only those languages spoken by titular nationalities of republics, oblasts or okrugs had writing systems, and were taught in schools
- Some less-successful written languages phased out (such as Udi and Tsakhur)

Kabardian: the problem of representing “exotic” and coarticulated consonants

- Alphabets of
  - 1. Noghma (19c.)
  - 2. Uslar
  - 3. Latinized (1920s)
  - 4. Cyrillic (1930-38)
  - 5. Proposed in 1970
  - 6. Current (since 1938)
Modified Georgian scripts for Abkhazian and Ossetic (1938-1954)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional characters used for</th>
<th>Centralized vowel, labialization, palatalization, etc.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Modified Georgian alphabets</td>
<td>Extended Georgian alphabets used for Svan and Mingrelian</td>
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Stalin’s toast to the Russian people at the end of the war, 1945

Я, как представляющий нашу Советскую Армию, хотела бы поднять тост за здоровье нашего советского народа и, прежде всего, русского народа. Бессмертные, проделанные идущеми, страдания, упорство.

Я пью за здоровье русского народа, потому что он является наиболее выдающейся нацией из всех народов, ведущих в мире Советского Союза.

Я пью за здоровье русского народа потому что он заслужил в этой войне и больше заслужит здравие, если всего, руководящий им наш Советский Союз предстанет перед народом нашей страны.

Я пью за здоровье русского народа без поколения, чтобы он — ведущий народ, но и потом, что у него имеется задавать немецким, обладающим даром немецкий и гордость.

- Public declaration of Russians as “most prominent” and “leading” Soviet nation, first among equals, with special attributes.
- “Affirmative action” progressively decreased, anti-Russian attitudes denounced as vigorously as Great-Russian chauvinism (e.g. debate over representation of Tsarist Russians in 1943 History of Kazakh People).

Late-Soviet and post-Soviet language issues: identity & politics

1. Khrushchev: De-Stalinization, increasing prominence of Russian in schools and public sphere.
3. Abkhazia: growing alienation from Tbilisi and the Georgian language.
4. Gorbachev years: Language rights adopted by other union republics.
5. Post-Soviet period: language issues in the independent Transcaucasian republics. The Mingrelian language-or-dialect debate.

The Khrushchev period: 1954-1964

- 1954: De-Stalinization and anti-Georgian campaign; Cyrillic once again for Abkhaz and Ossetic.
- 1956: Violent suppression of protests in Tbilisi.
- 1957: Rehabilitation and return of deported North Caucasian peoples.
- 1958: Educational directive on teaching of Russian in schools.

1956 March protests in Tbilisi

- Shortly after Khrushchev denounces the abuses of state power under Stalin and the cult of personality, crowds in Tbilisi and some other Georgian cities gather in protest at statues of Stalin.
- In Tbilisi, non-Georgian troops are brought in to suppress the demonstration; dozens of protestors are killed.
- In addition to expressions of pro-Stalin (or anti-Khrushchev) sentiment, some calls for Georgian independence are heard.
- Some believe this protest marked the emergence of the post-war Georgian dissident movement.

The post-Stalin Abkhazian alphabet

- Current alphabet at left, compared to phonetic transcriptions, both Latin alphabets & Georgian script.
- Hybrid origins, contains some characters invented by Uslar.
- Unlike all other Cyrillic-based scripts, glottalized stops are unmarked, whereas aspirates marked by a hook (reverse marking for affricates).
The Brezhev period: 1964-1982
• Brezhnev clients named to post of First Party Secretary; remained in power for most of the Brezhnev years.
• Period of stagnation and relative prosperity, maintained by widespread clientalism and corruption, collusion of government in defense of national language & culture
• Azerbaijan: Heydar Aliyev, 1969-1982
• Georgia: Eduard Shevardnadze, 1972-1985
• Armenia: Karen Demirchian, 1974-1988

Dissident activity in Georgia
• 1960s: emergence of patriotic manifestations, mostly at Georgian Orthodox feastdays such as Easter
• 1970s: alliance of Georgian intellectual dissidents with colleagues in Russia, such as Sakharov. Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Merab Kostava emerge as leaders.
• Samizdat publications circulate. Key themes: defense of Georgian culture & language; calls for autonomy or independence; the issue of Abkhazia.

Official languages in the constitutions of the union republics of the USSR
• The three Transcaucasian republics retained the official declaration of their respective languages as state languages in their Soviet constitutions.
• In the other republics, no mention was made of official languages
• With regard to the increasing presence of Russian in schools and the public sphere, Brezhnev continued on the path begun under Khruushchev (and prefigured by the new prominence of Russian and Russians in late Stalinism)

Georgian as state language in the 1926, 1937 and 1978 Georgian SSR constitutions

The teaching of languages in Soviet Georgian schools
Patterns of language-teaching in Georgia's late-Soviet schools

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching in Georgian-Language Schools (periods per week)</th>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>Russ Lg/Lit</td>
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<td>Geo Lg/Lit</td>
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Trilingual programs in Azeri & Armenian schools within Georgia (Georgian as third language)

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<th>Teaching in Azeri-Language Schools (periods per week)</th>
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<td>Russ Lg/Lit</td>
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<td>Geo Lg</td>
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Georgian not taught at all in Abkhazian and (South) Ossetian schools, whereas more hours of Russian than native language

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March 1978: proposed change to Georgian SSR constitution

The removal of the provision for Georgian as state language would have brought the constitution of Georgia (also Armenia and Azerbaijan) into conformity with the other union republics, none of which had such a provision.

14 April 1978: Mass protests in Tbilisi in defense of the status of the special status of the Georgian language

• Despite Shevardnadze’s warnings of another massacre as in 1956, over 10000 protestors massed in front of the government building, where the parliament was meeting to vote on the constitutional changes.
• Although many Tbilisi militia officers were ethnic Ossetians, only Georgian officers were present, not bearing weapons. Rumors spread that behind the last line of militiamen were armed Soviet soldiers.
• Loudspeakers broadcast the parliament session to the crowd. Finally, the Georgian Supreme Soviet voted to retain the status of Georgian as state language.
• To avoid similar protests in Armenia or Azerbaijan, the Soviet leadership agreed to the same provision for those republics.

Georgian-Abkhazian relations

• 1938: Imposition of Georgian script
• 1946: Closure of Abkhazian-language schools, replaced with Georgian
• 1951: Georgian literary historian Pavle Ingoroqva argued that medieval population of Abkhazia was Georgians, and that Abkhazians migrated from Northwest Caucasus in 17th century.
• 1954: Cyrillic script for Abkhazian, reopening of schools
• 1978: After Moscow agreed to Georgian language demands in April 1978, a group of 130 Abkhaz intellectuals send a letter to Brezhnev asking that the Abkhaz ASSR be incorporated into the RSFSR. In response, large investments are made on behalf of Abkhazian culture, including a university in Sukhumi with an Abkhazian-language sector, Abkhazian TV programs, etc.
Re-Latinization of Azeri in 1992: New school primers; Latin-script signs

Support for conversion to Latin (Lynley Hatcher 2008)

To support the Latin script and a Turkic identity, Turkey soon began sending in Latin script typewriters (Cornell 1999: 68). It directed television programming to Azerbaijan with subtitles in Latin script (Robins 1993: 605), as well as working to increase its influence by a variety of foreign aid, including trade and the opening of schools in Azerbaijan (Aras 2000).

Heydar Aliyev, the next president of Azerbaijan, greatly supported the Latin script initiative in terms of nation building and the creation of a distinct Azerbaijani identity. Aliev, a former member of the Politburo, was often complimented for having better Russian than that of his Russian colleagues. Nevertheless, he was a strong advocate for the transition to the Latin script and of moving away from Russian language usage throughout his presidency. In early 2001, Aliev declared 1 August 2001 the deadline for a mandatory shift from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet. This decree included newspapers, books, government documents, and government correspondence switching to the Latin script (Blair 2003: 17).

Some older writers accept that their works in Cyrillic will one day be unreadable

Even writers who support the shift to the Latin script recognize that within several years of the shift, many of their own works published in the Cyrillic script will be inaccessible to young people taught to read in the Latin script. Kamal Talibzade (2000: 66) has faced this and made a clear choice for the Latin-related identity.

Within five years or so, the younger generation won’t be able to read my books. Sometimes I think: “What a pity! I’ve been serving this society as a scholar for 55 years. But none of my books will even be readable in the future.” I’m still convinced, however, that we made the right decision to embrace Latin. Our future is the main issue… I’m among the happiest people in the world because I’ve seen the collapse of the Soviet Union… It’s important for us to adopt the Latin alphabet.

Bilingualism in Azerbaijan

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<th>Country</th>
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<td>Bosnia</td>
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<td>Azerbaijan</td>
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<td>Refugees in Armenia (Azeri)</td>
<td>96.3</td>
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II. Armenia

- Ease of transition: language already official, no script change needed, nearly homogeneous populations
- Below: protest against Soviet rule in 1988

The special importance of the Armenian script

- The Armenian script is intimately connected to the history and culture of the Armenians since their adoption of Christianity in the 4th c.
- The unique script, like the distinctive monophysite Christianity of the national church, is a highly significant, almost fetishized, symbol of Armenian identity
Alphabet monument near Artashavan commemorating 1600th anniversary of invention

- Another alphabet monument, at Oshakan, the place of birth of St Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor of the Armenian alphabet

The situation of Russian in Armenia

- Russian remains the second language of most adults, and the language most taught in Armenian schools, but use is declining among young people

Bilingual signs: English replacing Russian

- Old Armenian-Russian signs still around, but new signage (as above in Erevan, 2010) favors English as second language

Nagoro-Karabakh: erasure of Azeri language

- road signs in Karabakh: Armenian only, or Armenian-Russian bilingual

III. Georgia

- Renaming of toponyms and street names (often restoration of pre-Soviet names)
- Erasure of Russian/Cyrillic from signage, replacement with English
- Influx of English loans into Georgian language (including written use)
- Active promotion of English in Georgian schools; TLG program
Restoring old toponyms

- Senak'î (Mingrelia): renamed after Bolshevik Mixa Cxak'âia (1933-1976), then only Cxak'âia (1976-1989)
- Dedoplis-c'q'aro ("Queen's Spring", Kakheti): renamed C'itel-c'q'aro ("Red Spring") from 1963-1991

Besides restoring old names, Georgian authorities name streets after recent political figures

- Tbilisi Sabanbulo to consider renaming street in honor of Richard Holbrooke

Signage in Georgia: English supplants Russian as international language

- English in both official and private signage
- In road signs, English lettering often painted over earlier Cyrillic
- "Integration into NATO": signs addressed to foreigners sometimes in English only

Sometimes Georgians disagree with new street names

- The highway leading to Tbilisi airport was renamed "George Bush Street" when Bush visited in 2005.
- Street named after living person: not practiced in most countries; harks back to Stalin years

Traces of the earlier presence of Russian

- The occasional Georgian-Russian street sign (that hasn’t been redone in English)
- Prosmantà’s famous advertisements from late-Tsarist Tbilisi

Sometimes Georgian citizens take the initiative in street renaming

- Facebook page with petition to name street after late Polish president who supported Georgia in August 2008 war
Saakashvilian trilingualism?

- Billboard in central Tbilisi (2005), with three messages in three languages, intended for three audiences (P. Manning)
  1. Georgian: “strength in unity”
  2. English: “celebrating Georgia’s diversity”
  3. Russian: “Georgia is my homeland”
- strength for Georgians, celebration & diversity for Americans, rodina for Russians

Loanwords in Georgian

- In the Tsarist period, numerous Russian words entered Georgian, especially for concepts with which the Georgian became familiar through Russian
- These words were accepted in written use and included in dictionaries
- Many Russianisms also appear in Georgian literature of the time (e.g. the writer Vazha-Pshavela referred to Germans as nemcebi < Russian nemeц)

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<thead>
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<th>GEORGIAN</th>
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Some Russianisms in Chelidze’s Georgian-Russian Dictionary, pub. 1990 (all of them now excluded from normative literary Georgian)

Russian loanwords in Soviet Georgian

- At the end of the Tsarist and beginning of Soviet periods, Georgian lexicographers and linguists adopted the policy of banning Russianisms, unless they were either “international words” — lexemes based on Greek, Latin or West European roots, such as philharmonia, p’omada, k’abinet’, hulgan, valdorni (< Waldhorn) — or terms specific to Russian culture (samovari, borshchi)
- At the same time, Georgian (especially Tbilisi) slang was full of Russianisms, which were regularly denounced by language purists

English loanwords in post-Soviet Georgian

- Occasional English loans began appearing in late-Soviet Georgian slang (viseksaot “let’s have sex”)
- After independence, the flood-gates opened. Numerous expressions entered the language from:
  1. US popular culture (rep'i < rap, hevi-met'ali)
  2. Business, finance, journalism, marketing (p'iari < PR = Public Relations, int'egrirebuli mark't'etinguli k'omunik'aciebi “integrated marketing communications”)  
  3. Technology, media (masmedia < mass media; vebsait'i < website)
  4. The jargon of grant agencies, NGOs, sociologists, conflict studies, etc. (identoba “identity”, genderi, t'reningi “training”)
- Many Anglicisms appear regularly in Georgian print and broadcast journalism, as well in the language of politicians and the younger generation of social scientists and intellectuals

Teach and Learn with Georgia program

- Program launched by Saakashvili administration with the goal of recruiting 1000 native English speakers to teach in primary and secondary schools throughout Georgia
- Teachers are placed in villages and small towns as well as large cities like Tbilisi or Batumi
- Results so far are mixed: Some cases of culture-shock and misunderstandings; complaints about poor infrastructure in rural schools, lack of textbooks and supplies, low level of preparation of students and Georgian teachers

Mingrelian: language or dialect?

- Mingrelian spoken by over half a million Georgians, concentrated in province of Mingrelia/Samegrelo
- Distinct identity in Middle Ages? “Egros” < Egrisi (ancient name of Mingrelia) as one of the sons of Targamos
- Mingrelian speech described by 17th c. Italian missionaries, Çelebi
- Vakhushti & Saba Orbeliani described Mingrelian as ‘distorted Georgian’
- Intelligibility: Mingrelian (unlike Svan), sounds Georgian, but cannot be understood by other Georgians
Russian colonialism and Mingrelian

- Gülzendenstädt and Klaproth described Mingrelian as a “dialect” (Mundart) of Georgian, but analyzed it as a separate language, along with Svan.
- Rosen (1844) and Tsagareli (1880) call Mingrelian a language (Sprache, jazyk), write it with Georgian characters.
- Mingrelian texts in the Sbornik materials written in Cyrillic (mingrel’skaja azbuka).
- Proposal by Russian clergy to translate Bible and catechisms in Mingrelian, rejected by Mingrelians themselves and Georgian intelligentsia.

Mingrelian during the Soviet period

- 1926 census: Mingrelian language counted separately.
- Brief period of publishing (newspapers and Communist manuals), as well as use in schools, 1930-35.
- 1939 census: Mingrelian no longer listed.
- “Samizdat” writing in Mingrelian, including translations of national epic “Knight in the leopard’s skin” (at least two different translations, earliest by K. Zhvania in 1966).
- Large number (disproportionate?) of Mingrelians in Georgian cultural elite, intelligentsia: vyshij sort Gruzin.

The Mingrelian question today

- Mingrelian refugees (over 100K) in Tbilisi and elsewhere in Georgia, after Abkhazian War of 1993.
- Political tensions: Mingrelians associated with Zviad Gamsakurdia and his policies.
- Increasingly tendentious debate over status of Mingrelian as “language” or “dialect”.
- Criticism in Georgian press and chat groups about use of Mingrelian in writing (esp. the possibility of a translation of the Bible into Mingrelian; 75% opposed in an on-line poll).
- Introduction of Mingrelian writing in Abkhazia.

Mingrelian linguistic debate

- Two extreme positions:
  1. Mingrelian as dialect, with Georgian as literary standard and “mother tongue” (deda ena). Since Mingrelians are Georgians, their speech can only be regarded as a Georgian dialect (Gamsakurdia, Putkaradze, Metropolitan Ananias).
  2. Mingrelian as language, to be used in publication and taught in schools. As an endangered language, it requires special protection. Furthermore, the Mingrelians are a distinct ethnicity from the Georgians (Hewitt, Feurstein).
  3. Caught in the middle: Georgian (including most Mingrelian) and foreign linguists who refer to Mingrelian as a language based on standard definition in terms of mutually intelligibility, but who acknowledge that the Mingrelian speech community is an integral part of the Georgian nation.

Christmas sermon of Georgian Orthodox Patriarch Ilia II, Jan 2011

- “As is well known, at the end of the 19th c., work was undertaken in the Tsarist Russian empire on the ‘scientific’ concept — consistent with the policy of divide-and-rule — of the independent existence in Georgia of the Mingrelian, Laz, Georgian and Svan languages and cultures. This process, more or less hidden, is once again occurring, and of course, it can only serve the interests of foreign nations…”