UNESCO Atlas of Endangered Languages
and analysis of the speech of Adjara border villages

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Abstract

In the presented work, we offer an analysis of the endangered speech of Georgia-Turkey border villages of Adjara, more precisely, lexical signs, which mainly cover the mountainous area of Upper Adjara (Keda, Shuakhevi districts and partially Khelvachauri). There is also a discussion about the definition of language vitality assessment system and criteria, and the necessity of documenting languages and developing a new language policy is emphasized. It is worth noting that the research covers the data collected during the fieldwork of the project LaDyCa (Language dynamics in the Caucasus), as well as existing sources and scientific studies developed by the research center of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University (BSU).

We show that this sector of the Georgian diasystem, still understudied, is rich in linguistic facts and can be defined as a window

to the processes of cultural acculturation. The research will also include a brief overview of the Georgian dialect preserved in the Turkish villages near the border of the Adjara region.

Introduction

Linguistic diversity stands as a foundational pillar of our cultural heritage. Beyond its role in communication, language embodies the very essence of humanity's collective wisdom, capturing values, worldviews, and safeguarding cultural identities. The extinction of a language results in the irrevocable loss of not only its linguistic nuances but also the profound knowledge enshrined within it. Each language spoken across the globe serves as a testament to the rich tapestry of human cultures. Nevertheless, UNESCO warns that a considerable number of the world's languages are perilously close to vanishing forever, with one language disappearing approximately every two weeks[48]. In light of this urgent challenge, the imperative emerges to meticulously document endangered languages and formulate a robust language preservation policy for the future.

The genesis of extensive global language research can be traced back to 1997, a pivotal year marked by the signing of a memorandum in Paris on behalf of UNESCO. This momentous event marked the commencement of concerted efforts aimed at examining the status and challenges confronting languages worldwide, alongside the implementation of research initiatives geared towards recognizing the imperative of safeguarding our global linguistic heritage.

Central to this undertaking was the imperative to conduct a comprehensive census of the world's languages. The accomplishment of this ambitious task hinged on the meticulous collection of primary data, which in turn would unveil the authentic state of linguistic

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[48]https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000189451/PDF/189451fre.pdf.multi

diversity across the globe. To facilitate this endeavor, a specialized questionnaire consisting of 40 questions, encompassing both open-ended and closed-ended formats, was meticulously formulated. These questions were meticulously crafted following the time-honored criteria of sociolinguistics, as elucidated by Haugen in 1972. It is pertinent to acknowledge that the exploration of language distribution and associated challenges had commenced well before, under the astute guidance of Stefan Wurm[49].

For the past two decades, UNESCO's cohort of experts has exhibited unwavering dedication to the ongoing scrutiny of minority languages.

Einar Haugen introduced a novel paradigm for the examination of languages, which he termed "Language Ecology." This ground-breaking concept revolves around investigating the intricate interplay between a specific language and its surrounding environment. In essence, "language ecology" delves into the dynamic relationship and mutual influence between a language and its contextual surroundings. This approach encompasses the following key principles:

- The linguistic milieu is formed by the community employing the language as one of its communicative tools.

- The language finds its existence within the cognition of its speakers, thereby operating within the societal or natural context.

- A facet of the language's ecological dynamics pertains to the psychological realm: it engages with other languages in the minds of individuals proficient in multiple languages.

- Another facet of this ecological balance is sociological: the language interacts with the society wherein it serves as a medium of interaction.

The vitality of a language hinges predominantly upon the individuals who acquire, employ, and pass on the language to fellow members of the community.

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[49] https://muse.jhu.edu/article/25449/pdf#info_wrap

Commencing in 2001, UNESCO's panel of experts has been diligently crafting a cohesive framework to establish a system for gauging language viability, along with associated criteria. A spectrum of elements shapes the degrees of endangerment. While the linguistic community diverges in viewpoints regarding the identification of risk factors, consensus centers around the pivotal role of intergenerational language transmission. The criteria encompass a multitude of factors, among which the following merit emphasis:

- Demographic factor (speaker count; ratio relative to overall population).

- Political factor (language policies; availability of educational resources).

- Sociological factor (language perception; alterations, usage domains; generational passage).

- Linguistic factor (existence of language documentation) (Moseley, 2012:5).

The evaluation of hazard levels is entwined with multifaceted intricacies.

Here are a few examples that serve as illustrations:

1. Language usage within the family but excluded from school curriculum: in situations where a language is spoken within a family context but isn't formally taught in schools, the language is likely being transmitted and maintained solely through oral means. An apt instance of this phenomenon can be observed in the vicinity of the Georgia-Turkey border. Here, the Laz language is relatively well-preserved within the community; however, due to its absence from educational settings, its practical applications remain constrained.

2. Impact of migration processes: when an individual resides within a society that predominantly employs a language different from their own, their ability to utilize their native language for daily communication diminishes. It's important to acknowledge that the

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specifics of each circumstance vary and necessitate in-depth analysis. However, a common thread emerges: an endangered language faces bleak prospects for expansion and evolution under such conditions.

In its most recent edition[50], the UNESCO Atlas, now in its third iteration, employs a comprehensive framework for evaluating the vitality and vulnerability of languages. This framework relies on five primary criteria to gauge the extent of threat posed to a language: Vulnerable, Endangered, Clearly Endangered, Critical Situation, and Extinct Languages.

Languages of the World by Level of Vitality, Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, 2010. © UNESCO

In a broader context, two primary dimensions of language threat can be identified:
1. Number of speakers who associate themselves with a particular language.

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[50] Atlas of the World's Endangered Languages, 3rd edition, Spain, 2010. p. 12
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000189451/PDF/189451fre.pdf.multi

2. Functions and domains of language use: the second dimension revolves around the practical functions and domains in which a language is utilized. This aspect is inherently linked to the gradual weakening of a language's influence.

The accompanying diagram visually represents the world's languages categorized by their vitality levels as outlined in the UNESCO Atlas.
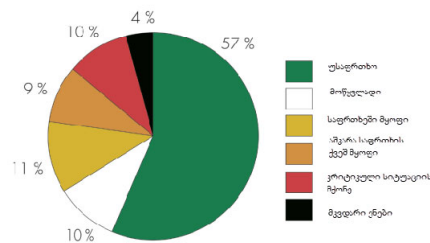
Taking guidance from the statistical insights derived from global language studies, contemporary estimates suggest the existence of around six to seven thousand languages worldwide[51] (according to Ethnologue). However, a striking statistic reveals that approximately 97% of the global population employs only about 4% of these languages. Conversely, a mere 3% of the populace communicates in as many as 96% of the world's languages (Bernard, 1996). Presently, within the European Union, the spotlight is on 128 languages that face varying degrees of endangerment.

Revitalizing and preserving a language, whether on a practical or emotional level, presents a formidable challenge. As a language descends into the depths of obsolescence, a pervasive sense emerges – a sentiment that this language lacks the standing required for integration within the broader society or regional context. Consequently, it loses its limited socio-economic significance and its utilization becomes confined. This stunted trajectory leads to an impasse in its development and a consequential halt in the intergenerational transfer of linguistic knowledge.

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[51] https://www.ethnologue.com/

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Our engagement with this pressing issue traces back to 2017, coinciding with our participation in LaDyCa (Language Dynamics in Caucasus). LaDyCa constitutes a collaborative initiative involving Paris Sorbonne University and Ilia State University. The primary objective of this undertaking centered around the comprehensive exploration of Caucasian languages, with a primary focus on the Kartvelian languages. This endeavor hinged on the application of quantitative dialectology, socio-phonetic analysis, and eco-linguistic methodologies.

Methodology

In the investigation of language dynamics, we employed the techniques pioneered by Jean-Leo Leonard, specifically tailored for examining highland dialect variations within Mesoamerican languages[52].

In this current study, the Dialectometry method, augmented by the Gabmap algorithms, serves as our primary tool. The Gabmap software assesses dialectal dissimilarity through the application of the Levenshtein algorithm. This innovative approach empowers us to discern distinct dialectic regions. Moreover, the Gabmap platform provides a visual representation of locales where these language variants are in use. This feature significantly aids researchers in delineating dialectal borders, discerning differentiating factors among them, and accentuating the unique attributes of each individual dialect, facilitating comparative analysis.

Hence, the dialectological analysis facilitated by Gabmap proves invaluable in scrutinizing and comprehending language variations.

As part of the project's scope, we conducted visits to 15 highland villages within the Adjara region. A comprehensive collection of video files was meticulously curated for documentation purposes. In alignment with the geographical layout, our strategy entailed the deliberate selection of three villages from each district. Among these

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[52] http://jll.smallcodes.com/home.page

choices, one village was positioned in the highlands, a second inhabited the middle terrain, and a third, in terms of elevation, occupied a relatively lower position. To maintain a robust analysis, a minimum distance of 13 kilometers was ensured between these chosen villages. This systematic approach to fieldwork was designed with the primary objective of gauging the extent of dialectal divergence across the region's villages.

The narratives encompass a diverse range of subjects, encompassing legends, paranormal occurrences, pivotal regional stories, the collective farming experience, migratory accounts, traditions, wedding customs, culinary practices, rural peculiarities, and more. Through this comprehensive compilation, a foundational repository has been established. This repository holds significance not only from a linguistic vantage point but also within the realms of history, literature, and folklore appreciation.

Results

The LaDyCa project was dedicated to the preservation of endangered linguistic diversity in the Georgian regions marked by vertical landscapes. This initiative, closely aligned with the Alpine Linguistics paradigm, sought inspiration from Joanna Nicholls' conceptual framework. The term "Alpine Linguistics," coined by Nicholls, seamlessly integrates diverse elements: ethnic geography, ethno-history, intricate interactions between contact languages, and the intricate ecological tapestry characterized by vertical terrain and the interwoven layers of societal interdependence among linguistic communities.

Central to the LaDyCa project is the investigation of language dynamics. This endeavor delves into quintessential inquiries of linguistic evolution through a contemporary lens that delineates the developmental trajectory across temporal and spatial dimensions. Remarkably, linguistic attributes can be perceived as cultural markers, and their dissemination can be akin to the propagation of cultural phenomena and the dynamics of language evolution.

Language undergoes transformation across both time and space. In the former scenario, we engage with the historical evolution of language (diachrony), while in the latter, we encounter geographical variations (diatopic diversity). Despite their continuous interplay, these dimensions sustain a degree of autonomy. The contemporary Georgian language exhibits a diverse array of ethnic-territorial dialects. Nonetheless, these distinctions lack the pronounced disparities observed in regions such as the Romance-Italic or other distinctly differentiated European dialect networks. This subtle variance can be attributed to the formidable impact of the literary language, a legacy that has endured from ancient Georgian (5th century) to modern Georgian (18th century).

Consequently, the demarcation between dialects appears somewhat conditional for localized and regional entities. Dividing this spectrum presents challenges, as the same linguistic nuances might be categorized diversely by disparate scholars—ranging from dialects to sub-dialects. The accompanying map and dendrogram spotlight the centrality of the Kartli region and its association with the standardized Georgian language (depicted in green), juxtaposed against the northwestern expanse (embracing Imeruli, Guruli, and Lechkhumuri dialects) denoted in blue.

Map 1. Dialect areas, Ward distance, Gabmap interval 5.
Dendrogram 1. Class taxonomy of A 5 Georgian dialects (Gabmap).[53]
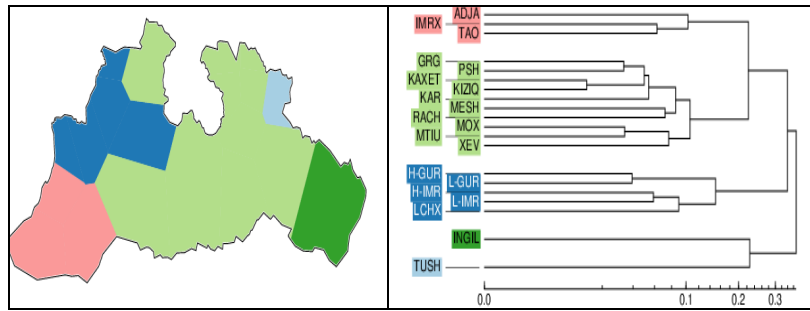
Adjarian, Imerkheuli, and Western dialects (highlighted in pink) are structurally affiliated with the central dialect of Georgian. Based on this data, Tushuri, located in the northeastern region (shown in light blue), and Ingilouri (a diasporic language variant spoken in Iran, indicated in dark green) can be identified as distinct variants—language varieties that lie beyond the central core of the diasystem. Nonetheless, the landscape of Georgian dialects is typically more intricate, exhibiting a diverse array of hues contingent on geographical coordinates.

The Adjarian dialect exhibits a subdivision into Upper Adjarian and Lower Adjarian variants. Nevertheless, there exists varying viewpoints within the academic realm regarding the categorization of Adjarian sub-dialects. One perspective posits that Upper Adjarian encompasses the Khulo and Shuakhevi dialects, while Lower Adjarian encompasses the Keda, Khelvachauri, and Kobuleti regions (Pagava, Tshetskhladze 2017: 40).

In our study, which relies on the Gabmap test (refer to Dendrogram 2 below)[54], our objective was to exclusively investigate the phonological aspect within this sector of the Georgian dialect network. Research demonstrates that Khulo and Keda lean towards the

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[54] The dendrogram was processed in the laboratory of the University of Montpellier. Taken from our own research: "Lexical Features of Upper Adjarian Dialect and Creative Thinking Preserved in the Collective Memory".

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literary language cluster, representing a somewhat assimilated branch. Conversely, Khelvachauri and Kobuleti are believed to share affinities with Shuakhevi. This arrangement challenges the traditional demarcation between Upper and Lower Adjara. Instead of neatly defined subdialects, linguistic variations emerge, thereby contesting the established framework of local classification.

Dendrogram 2. Ward's method, 3 classes/intervals:
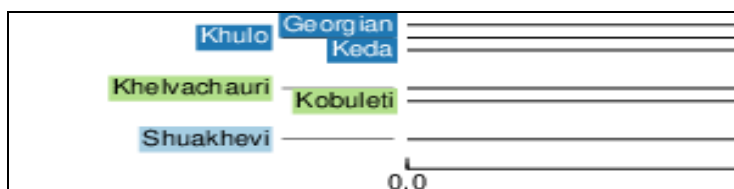*Five linguistic varieties of Adjarian vs standard Georgian, 27 phonological sources*

Table 1 displays a subset of 7 items from the comprehensive list of 27 tested words. This subset includes instances such as the deletion of the initial syllable (items 1, 3), the transformation of the noun vowel from palatal initial dorsal to the opposite and non-labialized form (item 2), the consonantization of the sonant prefix (items 4, 6), or its omission (item 5), along with the noun prefix.

Georgian	1. კბილი [kbili] /tooth	2. კამეჩი [kamechi] /buffalo	3. ქვა [qva] /stone	4. მხარი [mkhari] /shoulder	5. მგელი [mgeli] /wolf	6. მზე [mze] /sun	7. რკინა [rkina] /iron
Shuakhevi	kibili	jamushi	klde	pkhari	geli	mze	rkina
Keda	kibili	kamechi	klde	pkhari	mgeli	mze	kina
Khulo	kibili	kamechi	klde	khari	mgeli	mze	rkina

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Khelvacha uri	kbili	kambec hi	kilde	mkhari	mgeli	ze	rkina
Kobuleti	kbili	kamechi	kilde	pkhari	geli	bze	rkina

However, within the context of the Adjarian dialect, apart from the phonological isoglosses highlighted earlier, we notably identify a collection of lexical elements originating from foreign languages, specifically Turkish and Arabic. This phenomenon is rooted in the historical narrative of the region: external dominion exerted an impact on the vocabulary integrated into the local Georgian speech. Numerous borrowings from foreign languages permeated the fabric of the Adjarian sub-dialect, yet without significantly altering its overarching lexical composition. While phonological shifts, as demonstrated in Table 1 above, did transpire, the fundamental lexical content of the dialect predominantly remained unaltered.

The distinction between Upper Adjarian and Lower Adjarian is also discernible through intonation patterns. In Adjara, a descending diphthong has endured in words like ფთაჲ, დროჲ, დღეჲ... It is ჲ that creates the descending diphthong (M. Pagava).

Phonetic attributes distinctive to Adjarian speech encompass assimilation, dissimilation, elision, metathesis, iotization, and vowel transformation. On a broader scale, the idiosyncrasies of the Adjarian dialect can be attributed to its proximity to Gurian and Meskhetian accents. Additionally, the Turkish language has exerted a certain influence on the vocabulary within the Adjarian dialect (Pagava, 2013:136).

Figurative expressions constitute a segment of vocabulary that necessitates comprehensive and methodical scrutiny of everyday discourse. During the process of assembling lexical information, it is imperative to direct our focus towards figurative terms present within the dialect. Numerous words and phrases tend to evolve over time,

eventually relinquishing their original functionality to become relics of history rather than active constituents within the linguistic toolkit of contemporary speakers.

Figurative expressions manifest across diverse domains of vocabulary, where words or phrases crafted in this manner convey ideas metaphorically and succinctly. These linguistic constructs stand as "language gems," encapsulating not only literary significance but also imparting a distinct allure to communication, effectively conveying nuanced meanings.

Within Upper Adjarian speech, commonplace figurative expressions encapsulate the historical and spiritual life experiences of the Adjarian populace. Consequently, Upper Adjarian dialect stands out for its remarkably abundant assortment of figurative expressions. It's evident that these linguistic nuances diverge from the syntax and semantics of the literary Georgian language, a facet warranting dedicated investigation in its own right.

Discussion

Since the 16th century, the southern provinces of Georgia underwent Ottoman conquest, resulting in the coerced conversion of the local populace to Islam and widespread adoption of the Turkish language. Despite this, a number of linguistic practices have endured. Analyzing these remnants offers insights into the historical and linguistic fabric of the region.

Within these provinces, inhabitants successfully retained the Georgian language along with their inherent Georgian identity. While some individuals continue to use their native tongue, a significant portion of the younger generation struggles with their grasp of the Georgian language or lacks proficiency altogether. Consequently, there exists a tangible risk of certain Georgian sub-dialects vanishing entirely. Essentially, the narrative of southwestern Georgia's history depicts a phenomenon of linguistic acculturation, a process akin to the

trajectory experienced by the Laz language, which now stands as an endangered linguistic entity.

Currently, South Georgia showcases four discernible dialectal sub-divisions: Adjarian (inclusive of the speech of Muhajir descendants), Shavshuri (encompassing Machakhluri and Imerkhevuli speeches), Klarjuli, and Taouri.

Noteworthy within scholarly discourse is the significance of the Adjarian dialect. Its study is intricately tied to pivotal themes in Georgian historical dialectology, so much so that this dialect played a role in the development of written Georgian (Nizharadze 1975: 9).

"The Adjara dialect has conserved numerous archaic words in their original meanings from ancient Georgian. It stands as one of the oldest and linguistically diverse essential dialects within the Georgian language. Alongside other dialects of Georgian, it played a pivotal role in the evolution and refinement of the Georgian literary language" (Gigineishvili et al. 1961: 391).

In the present day, Tao, much like other Georgian villages in the Shavsheti-Imerkhevi region, bears an official Turkish designation. Nonetheless, the local populace, encompassing both Georgians and Turks, persists in using the traditional Georgian names for the villages and their distinct locales during their day-to-day interactions.

It's important to highlight that the Muhajir Adjarians— thousands of Muslims who departed the region and sought refuge in Turkey through immigration—alongside the Shavshes and Klarjes, established villages in various provinces within the Republic of Turkey. Remarkably, these communities have managed to uphold the language, folklore, and way of life of their forebears right up to the present day. The geographic expanse of the southern sub-dialects is widening in tandem with the expansion of these emigrant settlements (Pagava, Tshekladze 2017: 10).

It's essential to delve into sociolinguistic terms such as "internal dialect" and "external dialect." Taouri, Shavshuri, and Klarjuli detached

from the Georgian language system and evolved autonomously within a foreign linguistic environment. As a result, they can be classified as external dialects of the language. In contrast, Adjarian constitutes an internal dialect.

A fundamental distinction surfaces between these two dialect categories: despite each of them being linguistically intertwined with the Georgian system, they diverge significantly in their sociolinguistic relationship with the Georgian language. The internal dialect is shaped by the influence of the Georgian literary language, while simultaneously wielding an active impact on the literary language itself, essentially serving as an internal resource for its evolution.

Regarding vocabulary, the southern sub-dialects feature words that have been borrowed from Turkish, subsequently undergoing lexicalization and becoming ingrained within these dialects.

Conclusions

To conclude, it is vital to underscore the significance of the sociophonetic dimension within the LaDyCa project, as it serves as a cornerstone for bolstering the empirical foundation. This ensures that the secondary data within the word list remains in alignment with the latest and most current information, enabling a deeper comprehension of the internal forces driving changes.

Employing contemporary methodology, we've observed that certain word forms and expressions verified within our analysis material either lack presence altogether or carry a metaphorical significance, a trait common to the border villages of Adjara. These items don't appear in either the Georgian language dictionary or the dialect corpus. The speech of the residents from these villages showcases lexical elements dating back to ancient times, alongside descriptors unique to this particular region. Among these, many encompass words and terms that enjoy limited recognition within scholarly literature. The lexical data distinctive to this area

significantly contribute to identifying the lexical attributes of the Adjarian dialect as a whole.

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