

Will English become a new lingua franca in Georgia?

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Abstract

The paper reports on current language policy in the Caucasian country of Georgia with a focus on reforms concerning the use of the English language. It describes the historical and social context of the present governmental language policy and then discusses the role of English in distinct fields, such as the economy, tourism and education. The author also presents the results of original ethnographic research, based on semi-structured expert and other interviews, aiming to investigate the linguistic situation in the village of Duisi, inhabited by the Kists, one of Georgia's national and linguistic minorities.

Keywords: Georgia, Kists, lingua franca, Russian, language policy, government

1 Introduction

The present paper reports on current language policy in Georgia with a focus on policy concerning the English language. It is divided into four parts. The first part reports on the broad historical context including the political events in Georgia leading to the current governmental language policy. The second part focuses on the role played by the English language in present-day Georgian society. It outlines the government's reforms concerning the English language, and then attempts to capture the process of their implementation, including its challenges. The third part of the paper presents the details of the interviews and the results of the ethnographic research which was carried out in Georgia in the summer of 2011. The research aimed to investigate the language situation of the Kists – the Georgian Chechens – and their attitudes to the language policy of the state involving the promotion of the English language. The fourth part summarizes the results in a short conclusion.

2 History and political background

In order to understand the present political course taken by the Georgian government, the history of Georgia will be outlined briefly. The present lingua franca roles of languages will be placed into the historical context.

The present-day country of Georgia claims to be the successor to the united kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti (the endonym for Georgia is Sakartvelo, and the Georgian people call themselves Kartveli, hence part of the former name of the kingdom). The Christian Kartli and Kakheti kingdoms suffered numerous attacks by the Muslim Persians, but also by Arabs, Mongols and Turks. The key event leading to the Russification of the country occurred when the Kartli-Kakheti king Erekle II signed the Treaty of Georgievsk in 1783, seeking the protection of Christian Russia against another imminent Persian invasion (Baddeley 19-20, 45; Silogava and Shengelia 165–166). According to this treaty, “Russian soldiers were to be stationed in Georgia, and the king was to conduct his foreign policy in conformity with Russian preferences” (Suny 58). In other words, the Georgian kingdom was to be internally independent, while its foreign policy was to be in the hands of the Russian tsar. Russia, however, violated the Treaty when it failed to help Kartli-Kakheti against the Iranian shah Agha Mohammed Khan, who invaded the country and set fire to Tbilisi in 1795 (Baddeley 19). Georgia had thus not benefited from the Russian protectorate, nor had it regained its independence. The Georgians lived under Russian rule for almost two hundred years, with a short break, from 1801, when Tsar Alexander I decided to abolish the kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti – which had been annexed to the Russian empire the year before (Suny 59). Soon afterwards, Kartli and Kakheti were followed by other regions of present-day Georgia. The Russian Protectorate brought an end to the following principalities: in 1803 Mingrelia (Samegrelo), in 1804 Imereti, in 1809 Abkhazeti, in 1811 Guria, in 1833 Svaneti, and in 1828 southern Georgia (Baddeley 66; Suny 64). During the 19th century the protectorates were abolished one by one in all these areas and replaced with direct Russian rule.

Georgia underwent Russification under Russian rule. Suny writes that in 1840 “Georgian was eliminated as an official language for state business, though the majority of the people of the area did not understand Russian.” (Suny 72). Russian culture was promoted in the Caucasus, and the Russian language was to be spread (Suny 93). The colonial empire founded institutions in Georgia which provided education in the Russian language (Silogava and Shengelia 177). Some of the Georgian intelligentsia became gradually attracted by their rulers’ language and culture, and received an education in Russian, often in Moscow or St Petersburg. To illustrate the situation in Georgia in the second half of the 19th century, we will quote Suny describing the process of Russification in education:

From 1868 Georgian was clearly inferior to Russian, not only in popular attitudes or the views of officials, but in the law as well. The teaching of Russian was required in all schools in the empire, and Georgian was no longer a required subject. Beginning in the 1870s only private schools taught courses in Georgian, usually on the primary level, with Russian given as a special course. When a student reached middle school the courses were taught in Russian, with Georgian given as a separate course. As the result of state policy and legal discriminations, the percentage of schools that taught

a local Caucasian language steadily declined and those that taught all subjects in Russian increased. (Suny 128)

However, some of the Georgian intelligentsia opposed the Russification policy imposed on them from abroad. The opposition was mainly connected with the revival of the Georgian language, and it is not surprising that it had a nationalist character. One of the most significant promoters of the Georgian language protection was Ilia Chavchavadze, who contributed to the establishment of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among the Georgians in 1879, thus helping to revive national awareness (Silogava and Shengelia 187).

In May, 1918 Georgia declared its independence, which was to last until 1921, when the country became a part of the Soviet Republic (Silogava and Shengelia 208–216; Suny 192–208). In the 1930s the official Soviet policy significantly changed under Joseph Stalin's influence. The promotion of Georgian culture took place as part of the 'Korenizatsiia' policy (Stalin 1946), which aimed to reinforce national elements in governmental institutions in the various Soviet republics, thus appeasing local opposition and stabilizing Soviet rule in Georgia and other regions of the Caucasus. Stalin's "exasperating policy of divide et impera" (Baddeley 41) thus "gave Georgians the dominant role in a republic that still possessed significant non-Georgian minorities" (Suny 281).

At the same time, some sources state that 'national schools' were established in Georgia, providing instruction in minority languages, i.e. Georgian, Abkhazian, Russian, Ossetian, Azeri and Armenian (Suny 233). Other sources speak about a massive process of Georgianization in 1944 and 1945, only a few years later ("Summary of historical events"). In spite of these pro-minority reforms, a sudden reversal in Soviet policy stance soon followed, when in 1938 the Russian language became a compulsory subject in all Soviet schools, and "as a lingua franca for the whole Soviet Union was encouraged" (Suny 258).

Alongside the strengthening of Russification and the Soviet opposition to Georgian nationalism, the Georgians still seemed to show a considerable resistance to learning the Russian language after WWII and through the 1970s (Suny 300). This resistance finally resulted in openly expressed opinions in the 1970s, e.g. in 1975, when a petition was signed by the prominent members of the Georgian intelligentsia protesting against the implementation of bilingualism, or in 1976, when Revaz Japaridze, a Georgian writer, angrily spoke against "an order from Moscow that all textbooks for higher educational institutions be published in Russian and that dissertations and their defenses be translated into Russian..." (Suny 309–310).

Eduard Shevardnadze, who was then pursuing his career as the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, "tried to allay fears of Russification" (Suny 309), and two years later, when Russian and other minority languages were to gain legal official status in Georgia, he was the one who "stressed the importance of learning Russian and improving the instruction of Russian in Georgia in order to broaden the horizons of the Georgian people." (Suny 310). He obviously acknowledged the role of Russian as the lingua franca for the Georgians and the necessity of its knowledge for the integration into the Soviet Union when he stated that "... the sun rises for Georgia, not in the east, but in the north, in Russia – ... the sun of Lenin's ideas" (Suny 310). However, for many an educated Georgian and member of the Georgian intelligentsia, this was not the case even then – or at least

Russia was only regarded as a means of coming closer to the West: “The benefits of European civilization were greatly desired by a thin layer of Georgian society, and the road to the West lay through Russia. Generations of Georgian students trekked northward to Russian centres of learning to discover the latest intellectual advances of European thinkers.” (Suny 122). The opponents of Russification persevered in their resistance.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union and Georgia’s declaration of independence in 1991, the country has undergone many changes. These have included the wars in Abkhazia, where “the war ended in the so-called Moscow ceasefire agreement in April 1994” (Hoch 83), and South Ossetia, where the war lasted from 1991 to 1992. After Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s exclusionary nationalism exacerbated the Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts, and “proved to be more divisive than integrating” (Suny 326), Eduard Shevardnadze, a skilful diplomat and experienced negotiator, became the crucial political representative of Georgia. After serving as the *de facto* head of the country between 1992 and 1995, he was the President of the Republic of Georgia between 1995 and 2003, adopting “friendly relations with the Western World” (Silogava and Shengelia 247), leading Georgia to membership of the United Nations and the Council of Europe, and cultivating cooperation with NATO. At the same time, Georgia, which was “strategically situated between the Black and Caspian Seas, became focus of interest and conflict between the great powers, Russia and America” (Silogava and Shengelia 248), and a choice had to be made between the two directions.

After the apparently fraudulent (Silogava and Shengelia 248) elections of 2003, the Georgian people decided that the sun rises for Georgia neither in the east, nor in the north, but in the west. They turned towards the pro-Western reformist party, and conducted the ‘Rose Revolution’. The leaders of the new government were Mikhail Saakashvili, Zurab Zhvania and Nino Burjanadze, who belonged to the new generation of politicians, some of whom had already held important government posts previously, and who came to power in Georgia after 2003. Most of them were under forty years old and some of them were Western-educated. They became the ministers in one of the youngest governments in the world. They neither look back nostalgically at the former Georgian Soviet republic, nor do they have a “Soviet mentality” (Saakashvili “President”). The President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, is a typical politician of this generation. In his speeches both on a national and international stage he frequently refers to Georgia as belonging historically to the Western, mainly European, tradition (Saakashvili “President”; Saakashvili *Speeches*). His political aim is to lead Georgia to NATO membership and closer to the European Union: “Georgia is forever yoked to Europe. We are joined by a common and unbreakable bond – one based on culture – on our shared history and identity and on a common set of values that has at its heart, the celebration of peace, and the establishment of fair and prosperous societies.” (Saakashvili “Inaugural”).

Since 1999 Georgia has been part of the European Neighbourhood Policy. It has already achieved unprecedented success in the reform of the criminal justice sector and the fight against corruption, and its economic growth has considerably increased since then, with the EU being its main trading partner (“European Neighbourhood Policy – Georgia”).

Why has the Rose Revolution, with its pro-Western orientation, attracted any supporters at all? This question can be answered easily if we take into consideration Hugh Richardson’s statement: “The EU has reaped tremendous rewards from its soft power, the

result of which is an enlarged union of 27 Member States and unprecedented peace and prosperity on the European continent”. If we consider that the Georgian citizens were able to choose between geographically close Russia, with Putin’s colonial policy and intensive attempts at Russification (Georgia had been a subject of Russia for almost two centuries, after which it became an economically damaged region), and the European Union with its soft power and prosperous single market (Richardson; Nye), Europe and its values must have represented a more attractive option for them.

3 The English language reforms

In Shevardnadze’s era it was Russian that was the most frequently learned foreign language at schools in Georgia (*Formal semi-structured expert interviews with two Kist women*). However, the strong pro-Western orientation of the new government has been reflected in the country’s language policy, which logically began to turn towards English. Knowledge of the English language has been one of the factors which is intended to bring Georgia nearer to Europe as well as to the whole of the Western international community. The new language policy is mainly aimed at individual Georgian young people. The main body responsible for the implementation of the language reforms is the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia [hereafter MES]. Since 2009 the MES has been running the English Language Learning Strengthening Programme, which aims at “raising the competitiveness of graduates of Georgian schools and their integration within the international market.” (“English Language”).

The programme is thus aimed not only at young people, but also at teachers of English and their professional development. It involves three different sub-projects: “English-language summer schools in Georgia” (“English Language”) (enabling more than one thousand secondary school students to attend a summer English course in Georgia including classes conducted by native speakers), “English-language summer schools in the United Kingdom” (the best 100 students will go to the United Kingdom for two weeks to study English), and “Georgian High School Exchange Students’ Programme in the United States” (about 100 scholarships for Georgian students to study in the USA, funded 50% by the Georgian and 50% by the US Government) (ibid).

Moreover, since the school year 2010-11 English has been a compulsory subject at Georgian schools, taught to children from the 1st grade, whereas previously they might have started learning it from the fifth or sixth grade. This significant reform to the general education curriculum was initiated by the Georgian President in April 2010, who himself can speak English fluently, having received a university education in the USA. He explained that the reason behind this reform was the desire to enhance the competitiveness of the country’s young people. In his TV interview in Kutaisi on 6 April, 2010 Saakashvili also encouraged Georgian television stations to broadcast English-language movies with subtitles (Saakashvili, “Saakashvili Speaks”).

It must be added that the implementation of the English language into general education has also faced significant challenges. Firstly there is a shortage of English language teachers in the country, and secondly there is English teachers’ poor knowledge of English (*Informal interview with NGO worker*). Both problems are being tackled through the programme *Teach and Learn with Georgia* [hereafter referred to as *TLG*], which was

launched in Georgia in 2010. This programme resembles other programmes which were conducted in other countries in the past – including the Czech Republic in the 1990s. The main goal of the project is to recruit English-speaking volunteer teachers to teach English at Georgian public schools from 2010-2011. The commercial recruiting video placed on Georgian government websites emphasizes three dimensions of the project: it should “open doors” (“Teaching in Georgia video”) for young English learners, who will be able to communicate in English, plus they will be able to “...find a job easily...” (ibid) and use the internet. Further, there will be benefits for Georgian teachers of English, who will improve their knowledge of the language and enhance their application of teaching methodologies used in Europe and the USA. The volunteer teachers will gain “life-changing experience” (ibid), as well as being offered the opportunity to learn the Georgian language. The volunteer teachers, either native speakers of English or qualified or even unqualified (*Informal interview with NGO worker*) English teachers, are to participate in English language teaching with local teachers, and will be accommodated in their households, which will enable Georgian teachers of English to improve their English communication skills, as well as sharing “Western values and culture” (*Teach and Learn*).

Secondly, the cost of foreign English textbooks published by publishing houses in Europe was an insurmountable problem for many parents of children from socially vulnerable families from the very outset. The MES have been dealing with this problem in two ways. Macmillan Publishers Ltd has been selected in a public competition as the sole provider of English textbooks for Georgian children, as they are able to offer a textbook at 10 GEL [approx. €5], which is an acceptable price for a Georgian child (Barabadze; “Macmillan Education signs agreement with Georgia”). Moreover, the publishing house has funded training for teachers as a bonus to the deal (Barabadze).

This solution of the expensive textbook issue is a very innovative one, even by Western standards. In 2010 the MES introduced a reform which enables pupils from socially vulnerable families to download electronic textbooks from the *Buki – Learn with Joy* (*Buki*) websites. All the first grade pupils have been granted laptops for free by the MES since 2011, which should replace textbooks for them, thus saving their parents’ money (Samadashvili; Paichadze).

The implementation of the English language into general education in Georgia has also been facing harsh criticism. It is mainly the Georgian Labour Party that criticizes its anti-national character. In addition to the fact that the socialist Labourites claim to be pro-Western and pro-European, and their programme includes the country’s integration into the NATO and European Union structures, they also struggle to maintain good relations with Russia, and moreover, they appear to be nationalist (“Shalva”), which forms part of their highly populist policy (*Georgian Labour Party*).

In September 2011 the Georgian Labour Party addressed the United Nations committee on discrimination with the aim of eliciting a resolution “against the Anglo-American colonization of Georgia” (“Labourites urge”). This address seems to appeal to the voters inclined towards nationalism. It views the English language reforms being carried out in Georgia as part of the “destructive process of Anglicanisation of the future generation” (“Labourites urge”), involving the “expulsion of the Georgian language, history, religion and fundamental education away from schools” (“Labourites urge”). It even seems to display the Labour Party’s nationalist paranoia about the “oppression from the United

States and their companions of the Georgian language, education and culture” (“Labourites urge”). Giorgi Gugava, the Georgian Labour Party’s secretary, goes to absurd lengths when he says that the USA are “aiming at establishing slave colony of Georgia” (“Giorgi Gugava”), and the Rose Revolution policy funded by the Americans is part of this (ibid).

It is therefore obvious that the issue of implementing English language teaching has a political aspect, as a nationalist party is using populist arguments to gain votes. There is one more critical argument of the above-mentioned reform – which, however, has not been put forward by the opposition. It seems to have remained in the background of the discussion of the reform, in spite of the fact that it suggests the existence of grave difficulties with successful learning among children belonging to linguistic minorities. As Georgia is a multi-ethnic country with between 20–30% of its population speaking other native languages than its official language – Georgian (Sedlářová 293), the Georgian language is regarded as a uniting and integrating element for the citizens of Georgia in the present governmental language policy, one of whose crucial aims is to contribute to restoring the country’s integration. By law, Georgian is the only language of general education (with the exception of Abkhazian in Abkhazia), and it is in the process of attaining this status even in some of the regions inhabited by national minorities who attended ‘national schools’ in the past, receiving an education either in their mother tongues or in Russian (Kilasonia). So far they have had compulsory classes of Georgian as a foreign language at schools, but the lack of emphasis on communicative aims and inappropriate teaching methodology have not contributed to a good acquisition of speaking and listening skills. As the Armenians in Akhalkalaki commented on this issue: “We can only read the Georgian mkhedruli script without being able to understand the meanings of words...” (translated from Russian by Kopečková, *Informal interviews with the Georgian Armenians in Akhalkalaki*).

The insufficient knowledge of the Georgian language has been compensated for by the use of minority native languages or Russian as the lingua franca in the regions (Pop-janevski 39). For this reason, in the past, the communities of linguistic minorities often lacked motivation for learning Georgian. Therefore teaching the Georgian language as a second language has been a difficult job for the Georgian language teachers at schools attended by children belonging to linguistic minorities – both in the past (e.g. in case of the Kists), or in the present (e.g. the Armenians or Azeris) – trying to comply with the new reforms which require it as a language of general education (Kilasonia; *Formal semi-structured expert interviews with two Kist women*). Such children often enter school without any previous knowledge of Georgian. They first have to learn the language, and it usually takes them between six to seven years to start thinking in it (*Formal semi-structured expert interviews with two Kist women*). Learning a foreign language such as English with a different script from the first grade is thus another obstacle to their successful learning, which is generally best achieved in the native language (Dutcher 1-2).

Knowledge of the English language not only enhances the personal potential of young Georgian people and their competitiveness in the labour market. It might also lead to friendly relations with Western investors or business partners. After the Russian Federation started blocking imports of Georgian wines and mineral waters into Russia in 2006, and supported the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states (Sywenkyj; “Russia bans”), the European Union became the main trading partner for Georgia. New European investors are often attracted to invest in Georgia by the following results of a

survey carried out for the World Bank. In June 2011, eight years after the Rose Revolution, after the period of social and economic reforms in Georgia linked also to the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan, the World Bank ranked Georgia as the number 1 country among the Eastern European and Central Asian countries (apart from Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] high income countries) for Ease of Doing Business (“Economy Rankings”). If new Western investors are welcomed in the English language in Georgia by Georgian business partners capable of direct communication in English, such a factor might also contribute to doing business smoothly there and bringing money to the country. A Western businessman considering his investment in Georgia will probably launch cooperation more easily if he is directly spoken to in English than if having to communicate via an interpreter.

In addition to encouraging investment from abroad, the post-revolutionary governments and President Saakashvili resolved to achieve the reconstruction of the Georgian economy through the development of tourism: “Tourism gives us the chance in the shortest possible timescale to revitalise the economies of those parts of Georgia which are currently ruled by unemployment and depression” (Vardiashvili). Georgia does not possess natural resources which could be exported, nor does not have enough investments in production which could boost the economy. However, it offers outstanding natural beauty, including the sea, mountains on which skiing slopes can be built, caves, and rivers suitable for white-water rafting, but also plenty of very old and unique historical sights.

Languages also play a certain role in developing tourism. After arriving in Georgia, every English-speaking tourist will be pleasantly surprised to find that most of the notices with information one would like to read and understand – such as those giving instructions at the airport, street names and traffic signs – are provided bilingually, in Georgian and in English. Use of the English language might be one of the strategies to make the speakers of Latin alphabet languages welcome in a country where the Georgian mkhedruli script is unintelligible for most foreign tourists, unless they learn it. However, the replacement of the Russian notices from the Soviet times with English ones rather seems to be part of the Georgian pro-Western policy (as the analysis of the official statistics below will show) than a reflection of a change in the numbers of incoming tourists.

The information centres in Georgian cities and towns such as Tbilisi, Tkibuli, Signaghi, Batumi and Mestia, frequently visited by Western tourists, provide their services in the English language, but their employees are often able to communicate in other languages too, or at least they provide visitors with brochures in other languages, such as Spanish, French, Russian, Italian, Polish, Japanese, Chinese or Turkish.

As has been stated above, it is the Georgian government’s goal to prioritize tourism as an industry that will rescue the country’s economy and provide income and jobs in a country with high unemployment. The statistics of the “Arrivals of non-resident visitors at national borders of Georgia by country of citizenship” in 2000-2011 show that the highest number of visitors, including tourists on holidays but also businessmen, and people passing through, still arrive in Georgia from the countries whose citizens are more likely to communicate in Russian because of their shared communist history. Their numbers have been increasing proportionately alongside the numbers of the tourists from other parts of the world since 2000.

In 2011 Georgia was visited by almost 3 million tourists, out of whom 63% arrived in Georgia from the Commonwealth of Independent States (hereafter referred to as CIS), whose citizens are more likely to know Russian, and 32% from Europe (non-CIS), who are likely to prefer English for communication, including 1.5% who came from Central and Eastern Europe (non-CIS), while the remaining 5% arrived from the Americas, Africa and Asia (“Arrivals of non-resident visitors at national borders of Georgia by country of citizenship”). The estimate of the numbers of potential speakers of the respective languages presented here is a rough one; it does not take into account that some of the non-resident visitors might be Georgians from diasporas abroad, how long the visitors stay in Georgia, the fact that some Russians or other CIS citizens might communicate with Georgians in English, or that some of the visitors merely travel through Georgia in transit to another country. The estimate is only included to illustrate the fact that in reality, Russian still probably prevails as the lingua franca between non-resident visitors and Georgian citizens.

The practicality of replacing the Russian traffic and information notices with the English ones can be thus seen as some sort of marketing strategy which aims to attract Western visitors to the country; visitors from the post-Soviet countries are already familiar with the fact that they can often communicate in Russian with the local citizens. Obviously, it also works as a visible demonstration of the state policy.

Finally, the following lines will mention the role of the English language in everyday communication by Georgian citizens. Thousands of Western tourists have been an incentive for people who run small businesses to learn the English language at a basic communicative level. The businesspeople running guest houses, hostels, hotels, shops, cafes and restaurants in the regions frequently visited by the Western tourists – such as the Black Sea resorts, the historical town of Signaghi and the vineyards in its surroundings, Mestia in Svaneti, or the capital Tbilisi – prefer to communicate in English, even if you offer them the chance to speak in Russian. The use of English instead of Russian may sometimes be a necessity for them, when e.g. meeting numerous Israeli tourists – or it may be symbolic, openly demonstrating the change for the better in their lives. Alternatively, it may simply signal that they want to develop their English-speaking skills. Naturally, there are regions rarely visited by tourists, where generally only educated people speak English, while others still prefer Russian as the lingua franca.

Moreover, there are regions in Georgia where Russian notices can still be found too, as well as Armenian ones; for example in Javakheti street names are provided in three languages – Georgian, Armenian and Russian. The language issue and the national minority question seem to be sensitive topics in the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti (*Formal semi-structured expert interviews with two Kist women* and *Informal interviews with the Georgian Armenians in Akhalkalaki*); the English language is thus being introduced there more slowly both into general education and into infrastructure, and the English native speakers from abroad recruited via *Teach and Learn with Georgia* have not arrived at all schools in the region yet. However, the local people seem to be eagerly expecting their arrival in the future (*Informal interviews with the Georgian Armenians in Akhalkalaki*). They also seem to associate English with a better future for themselves, availability of employment, and Western investment – after the two Russian military bases providing employment to over 1,000 people, which represented the mainstay of the local economy, were handed over to the Georgians in June 2007 (Kakachia 200).

4 The Kists, their language situation and attitudes

The Kists, the Vainakh (Chechen) people, are one of the numerous ethnic minorities in Georgia, most of whose 7,000 people (“Ethnic groups”) live in relatively compact settlements in the Pankisi Gorge, Akhmeta District, Kakheti Region. They settled in this eastern region of Georgia two hundred years ago after being invited there by local dukes to protect the border area against the numerous Dagestani attacks from the Northern Caucasus (*Informal interviews with the Kist villagers in Pankisi*). But as Kopeček claims, “it was probably combination of more factors” (Kopeček 158). The reasons for their settlement also involved the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, and its economic and social consequences, such as the radicalization of the northern Caucasus under the rule of Imam Shamil, as well as the highlanders’ customary law of adat (blood feud) practised in Chechnya (Kurtsikidze and Chikovani, *Ethnography* 235–236).

In recent history, the Pankisi Gorge became famous after it was invaded by thousands of Chechen refugees during the Second Chechen War between 1999 and 2000, who included “militants and Islamic radicals, allegedly connected with Al-Qaeda,” and “the valley was effectively taken out from the government control” (Kopeček 159). The region was then bombed by the Russian air forces “claiming they conducted an anti-terrorist operation” (Kopeček 159). Most of the refugees left the valley at the beginning of the Second Chechen War, after the militants had been expelled by the Georgian army (Sanikidze 278). According to Tamaz Bagakashvili, a state official of the Ministry of IDPs in Duisi, “in 2010 only a few hundreds of the refugees stayed in the valley.” (Kopeček 159).

Culturally, the Kist community consists of two Sufi orders, the Naqshabandi Tariqat and the Kunta Hajji Tariqat, sometimes called the Quadiri movement, which was only established at the beginning of the 20th century in the region, and whose members place the adat above sharia law (Kurtsikidze and Chikovani, *Ethnography* 251–252) – but also of the Wahhabis, which is a derogative word for radical Muslims often belonging to the generation of young men who have studied in Arabic countries and have become influenced by the Saudi Arabian type of Islam. These young men built the so-called New Mosque in Duisi with the help of Arab money (*Formal semi-structured expert interviews with two Kist women*). There is also the so-called Old Mosque in Duisi, which was completed in 1902 (Kurtsikidze and Chikovani, *Ethnography* 250). In this mosque, the Chechen ‘zikr’, dancing accompanied by chanting of religious words, is practised by the older generation of Sufi Muslims. The members of the local order pray for peace in the world and in the Caucasus at zikr every Friday, as has been confirmed to me by Badi, the leader of the Kunta Hajji order in Duisi (*Informal interviews with the Kist villagers in Pankisi*).

The economic situation in Pankisi has not been satisfactory since the closure of the local felt-producing plant at the end of the 20th century. The local Kist population has been growing old as the young people have started moving away to find employment outside the valley (*Formal semi-structured expert interviews with two Kist women*). Therefore the leading representative of the local NGO Marshua Kavkaz (Peace for the Caucasus), which was founded in 1999, seized an opportunity offered by the Polish NGO Fundacja Edukacji Międzykulturowej and the Georgian Biological Farming Association Elkana, and together with other local volunteers established an agro-tourism project (*Pankisi*), which was to start a business bringing foreign tourists and their money to the poverty-stricken

region. Since then about fourteen families have been offering accommodation to the Western tourists (Kopeček 160), who are attracted to the region by means of the offer to attend and watch zikr, go tyre-rafting on the Alazani river, go hiking in the mountains, and spend time on local farms and eat their delicious home-made food (for more information on agro-tourism in Pankisi see Kopeček).

Agro-tourism in Pankisi has been gradually developing. Dozens of tourists now come to the valley every year, bringing extra income to some families. In addition to relatively modest profits, there seems to be another, spiritual effect of tourism on the Kists. When asked what she regarded as the greatest benefit of the agro-tourism project to herself and the community, one of the interviewees said: “I had started doubting our conservative traditions and their role in the modern society. But after speaking to tourists I realized that our traditions are interesting for other people, and I began to value them again more.” (translated from Russian by Kopečková, *Formal semi-structured expert interviews with two Kist women*). This was confirmed to me when I saw Sufi Muslims in the village of Duisi being very proud of their zikr tradition. Their leader literally forced us to video their rite in the mosque, encouraging us all the time with the words: “Snimayte! Snimayte!”. She was also very happy that we had arrived one day before their neighbour’s funeral, and she could proudly offer us the opportunity to attend it. Therefore tourism in Pankisi has probably contributed to a strengthening of the Kist people’s identity too.

The research conducted in the village of Duisi, which the author of the present article visited in the summer of 2010 and again in the summer of 2011, was based on ethnographic methods involving several interviews (see Hendl 189–190; Tulmets and Střítecký). Two expert semi-structured interviews were held by the author of this paper in Russian and partly in English, with a local Georgian language teacher and organizer of agro-tourism and a young postgraduate student helping to run an agro-tourism business. The setting of the interviews was the interviewees’ household. The interviews took about three hours, approximately ninety minutes each, and were transcribed by the author of the paper. The interviewees had been asked about their language preference for the interview. The teacher-interviewee opted for Russian, as her knowledge of English was basic. The student-interviewee decided to speak Russian most of the time, including some English passages, which seemed to have the function of expressing a liking for the interviewer. Several informal interviews were also held with local villagers in the village of Duisi, such as the leader of the Marshua Kavkaz NGO, her son and others, all of them in Russian, in people’s households or in the village. All the interviewees will remain anonymous in the present article. The aim of the expert semi-structured interviews was to investigate the local linguistic situation and people’s attitudes towards the governmental language policy with a focus on English. The results of the interviews have been summarized in the following paragraphs.

The local Kist population lives in Pankisi in a situation of diglossia, which is defined as the existence of two distinct varieties, formal and informal, within one community, which fulfil different social functions in different social contexts. The lower variety spoken by the Kists is Nakh, or the Kist dialect of the Chechen language. The interviewees confirmed that the Kist people in Pankisi only use this language when they speak to their family members, neighbours, but also to the guests and relatives who frequently come to visit them from Chechnya particularly in summer. The Kist dialect, or Kistinski, as they call it

in Russian, contains some vocabulary of Georgian origin, which has been the result of the impact of living in Georgian society, and it seems to have several sub-dialects. The sub-dialects are distinguished by distinct intonation patterns used by inhabitants of different Pankisi villages (there are six of them). Most of the local Kists cannot write or read in the Chechen language, unless they have studied in Chechnya in the Soviet past, or have taken the opportunity to learn it at university in Tbilisi, as the younger interviewee has done.

The high variety spoken by the Kists is the Georgian language, which is genetically unrelated to Kist Chechen. The Kist children start learning the language as soon as they enter primary school, and they simultaneously receive their general education in the language. The Georgian language teacher interviewee complained about the difficulty of teaching children in Georgian, as they can hardly learn anything before they manage to think in Georgian – which takes a few years (as has been mentioned in the paragraphs above). The Kists then use the Georgian language to communicate with the other peoples in Pankisi, both Ossetians and Georgians, who are settled behind the dam on the Alazani river, as well as to those outside Pankisi. The interviewees were very aware of the necessity to be proficient in Georgian as this language is the language of their integration into Georgian society, and a door to a possible university education as well as employment outside their valley. It is also the language of the television programmes they often watch.

The foreign languages Kist children are currently learning at several local primary schools are Russian and English. Knowledge of the Russian language is regarded as highly useful. It is used as the lingua franca to communicate with peoples of other countries in the Caucasus, to talk to most of the tourists coming to the valley, and to watch Russian television channels and the Georgian PIK channel (*Perviy Informatsionniy Kavkazskiy*) based in Tbilisi, providing “...the best of Caucasian culture and unbiased, critical and independent journalism.” (*Kanal PIK Podcasts*). The younger interviewee also stated that Russian might improve the prospects of finding a job in Georgia as most job advertisements require knowledge of the language optionally as an advantageous skill. There is still a Russian section in the local school, which was opened recently for the children of the Chechen refugees, but it will apparently be closed soon because of the current governmental policy supporting learning in the Georgian language (see the paragraphs in the section “English language reforms”).

English language classes have been taught at Pankisi schools of general education since September 2011. The interviewee claimed that they were expecting a teacher from abroad who was to come on the *Teach and Learn with Georgia [TLG]* programme. The teacher was to stay in their household, and the family, particularly the grandmother, were looking forward to “her” (not taking into account at all that it might be a male teacher). In addition to English classes taught at schools of general education, the Roddy Scott Education Centre in Duisi provides after-school English courses, organizing them for six local schools. The Centre is supported by the Roddy Scott Foundation (*Roddy Scott Foundation*), which was established in 2008 by Roddy Scott’s parents in memory of their son, who was a British freelance journalist and lived in Pankisi during the Second Chechen War, making a documentary film about the thousands of Chechen refugees in the valley. He was shot dead in the Russian Republic of Ingushetia in 2002 (“Killed Reporter’s”). In addition to organizing after-school English classes and computer skills courses for children, the foundation also provides training for local Kist teachers of English, and runs a nursery.

The local people seem to be grateful for their children's opportunity to attend classes at the Roddy Scott Education Centre, and most of the children use it (Zuzajan).

Both the interviewees have been learning English. The Georgian language teacher does so with the prospect of using it in communication with tourists, particularly with those from Israel. The younger interviewee was going to take an exam in English when studying at university in Tbilisi. They consider knowledge of English necessary if one wants to find a good job, as most of the advertisements for qualified jobs require a knowledge of English. They have positive attitudes to learning it, and are proud that the Kist children can learn it at school. Moreover, the student-interviewee claimed that English might be useful for one's university studies; she can use materials in English too, as well as the internet websites in English. In everyday life English is useful as a lot of products from Europe are imported to Georgia which only have instructions or information labels in English.

When evaluating the interviewees' reasons for learning the English language, it seemed to me that the women were managing very well without English in real life in most social situations at the moment, which is not the case of the Russian language. The student-interviewee needed Russian to study at university, as her field of study has been offered to students from all over the Caucasus, and a Russian Section has been opened after the MES had given special permission to the university to do so. She mainly connects the use of English with future prospects.

The interviewed representatives of the Kists seem to fully accept the present governmental language reforms concerning the introduction of the English language; they seem to associate English with a better future, improving their own income and finding qualified employment. However, they also have their own demands of the government. As the Kist Chechen language only functions as a low variety in the region, the Kists are concerned with its future prospects. The teacher-interviewee literally said: "I am afraid the Kistinski language will stop developing if children do not learn to write and read in it at schools." (translated from Russian by Kopečková, *Formal semi-structured expert interviews with two Kist women*). The children can only learn it now in optional classes, which are very limited within the general education curricula. The representatives of the local community therefore recently decided to send an official letter to Tbilisi asking for the introduction of compulsory lessons in the Chechen language at local schools. To their disappointment, their demand has been rejected with the argument that there are optional lessons at primary schools which can be used for similar subjects. The interviewee explained that the government does not regard the Kists as a national minority, and therefore it does not acknowledge their right to learn the Chechen language at schools within the curriculum. She also added that she could understand the government, even though she disagreed with it, as the issues connected with national minorities were a very sensitive topic in Georgia, connected with attempts at the re-integration of the separatist regions and the integration of the regions possibly threatening irredentism.

It will be useful to conclude by taking a brief look at the legal framework of minority rights protection in Georgia. The crucial legal tool for minority languages protection in Europe, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, has not been ratified by Georgia although the Georgian political representatives promised to do so more than ten years ago. The Kist interviewee's point of view is in agreement with Johanna Pop-janevski, a specialist in minority protection and security issues in Georgia, who claims

that “Governments [Georgian and Azerbaijani] have remained reluctant to ratifying instruments at all, as they are believed to be counter-productive to integration of national minority groups” (Popjanevski 8). It seems that unless the integration of the country is achieved, the protection of language minority rights will not improve.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, at the moment the state’s integration policies seem to outweigh language minority rights protection, and this approach is also reflected in governmental language policy. The first key goal is the integration of the acknowledged national minorities, such as the Armenians or Azeris, into Georgia. They should be enabled, by developing communication skills in Georgian, to participate in political life actively, to become educated in the Georgian language at Georgian universities, and to find employment in Georgia. All this should be achieved by strengthening Georgian language education. However, when promoting these goals, the Georgian government does not seem to realize that the loyalty or integration of national or unacknowledged national minorities are often also a matter of maintaining their identity. Therefore in addition to supporting their integration by means of integrating the Georgian language into the curricula within general education, often leading to their assimilation rather than integration, some disintegrating elements might be best appeased by allowing them to maintain their own cultures and learn (in) their respective national languages. The Kists seem to be very aware of the integrating role of the Georgian language, but they also aim to enhance their Kist Chechen language skills, a goal which is not currently supported by the government.

The second key goal is the integration of Georgian young people and other citizens into the Western English-speaking community, finding a better alternative for the state’s model than the Russian one. It is European soft power that is attractive for the Western-oriented Georgian politicians, involving Europe’s prosperous society and the peaceful relations among the EU member states. The introduction of the English language into Georgian society often symbolizes a better future for the people from poverty-stricken regions, such as Pankisi, while in other parts of the country, such as Signaghi in Kakheti or the capital Tbilisi, it is a matter of earning considerable income. People of any ages running small businesses offering services for tourists, such as guest houses, restaurants, cafes or shops, often prefer and are proud to speak in English to tourists, rather than Russian, as their customer base has been changing in recent times. If future governments manage to persevere this direction of policy, a new generation of Georgian citizens will grow up communicating in English fluently, which will make them part of the European and Western community, thus bringing certain benefits with it.

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