

**“I Am My Language”:**

*Language Policy and Attitudes Towards Language in Georgia*

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## Abstract

Given the context of tense relations in the post-Soviet period between Russia and Georgia, language policy in Georgia has become increasingly anti-Russian. However, evidence suggests that these policies do not necessarily reflect language attitudes accurately. This study examines the relationship between language policy and attitudes towards language in Georgia, looking at attitudes towards Georgian, Russian, and minority languages and whether or not attitudes vary according to generation. Through the lens of the mentalist approach—which relies on the attitude to be defined by one’s own expression as opposed to observable behavior—I conduct and analyze a small sample of qualitative interviews with Georgians. The supposition that the younger generation would have less attachment to their language was in part true, though nearly all respondents cited language as a central factor of their identity. This, however, was not incompatible with highly positive attitudes towards the Russian language, which all respondents had, and some mixed opinions of minority languages. The ability to maintain positive attitudes towards other languages while also having a strong attachment to one’s own language has implications that in a democratic setting attitudes can also inform future language policy.

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## Introduction

Language is an important marker of nationhood, some claim the most important, as it is the most audible.<sup>1</sup> Unlike ethnicity and religion, it has the specificity as being both an instrumental means of communication as well as being for some an intrinsic part of one's cultural and national identity. It is a salient issue in that it cannot be divorced from the state, unlike religion and ethnicity, where a state can adopt an attitude of "benign neglect," or non-interference. Language must be used in politics, in schools, in legal proceedings, on television, in print media. Because language is so visible and audible, it often becomes an important political tool, and can lead to conflict.<sup>2</sup> However, as it has been observed, much has been said about the "language of politics" but not the "politics of language."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in smaller nations, policies concerning a second or third language are doubly important in that they represent the predominant economic, political and cultural ties the country will have with the outside world: in some way, language policy determines a country's identity in the international sphere.

Attitudes towards language matter because they oftentimes reveal questions of identity. As E. Glyn Lewis points out, language "is an instrument for preserving the integrity of the group. Attitude to language, whether it is regarded symbolically, or as a criterion, or as a cohesive factor can range along a continuum from aversion to favour. [...] Language can be useful irrespective of any ethnic affiliation or emotional associations."<sup>4</sup> He further points out that language attitudes

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<sup>1</sup> Abrahamian, Levon, "Armenian Identity in a Changing World," Mazda Publishers 2006: 65.

<sup>2</sup> Arel, Dominique, "Language categories in censuses: backward- or forward looking?" *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*, Cambridge University Press, 2002: 92-120.

<sup>3</sup> Kymlicka, Will. *Multicultural Citizenship*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995: 111; May, Stephen. "Misconceiving Minority Language Rights: Implications for Liberal Theory," *Language Policy and Political Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2003: 123-124.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, E. Glyn, *Multilingualism in the Soviet Union*, Mouton & Co., N.C. Publishers, The Hague, Netherlands, 1972: 50-51.

can be complex and even contradictory given the versatility of its application in so many spheres of public life.<sup>5</sup>

The complexity of the relationship between language policies and attitudes towards language is the central focus of my study. I will take the case study of Georgia to examine this: Georgia offers rich grounds for such a study in that it is a nation that deeply valued its language as an integral factor of collective identity prior to its time under the Russian Empire and subsequent use of Russian as the second language of the country. In addition, the fact that the Georgian language historically enjoyed dominance in the multilingual and ethnically diverse Caucasus region gives an additional dimension to the linguistic study of Georgia. The relationship between the Georgian state and its linguistic minorities is vital to understanding the nation as a whole because they are both an integral part of the diverse country as well as entities that can be volatile, as it has been seen with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The relationship is particularly interesting because of the external push for increased pluralism from the minority rights discourse juxtaposed with a fear of separatism. Finally, of the former Soviet states Georgia has had one of the most dramatic shifts of policy in relation to the Russian language, and unlike in Latvia and Estonia, the absence of a large Slavic Russian-speaking community allows the study of language attitudes towards Russian as such and not in relation to a minority group. Knowing about Georgia's language attitudes can give important insights to see if language policies reflect people's perceptions of language. These attitudes also ultimately form voter preferences and can influence a country's policy, as well as relations with other countries.

The first part of this study will contextualize the research project by reviewing the history of Georgia as a nation through the lens of language, with a particular focus on the Soviet period's

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<sup>5</sup> Lewis 1972: 53.

language policies, the role of language in rise of the Georgian nationalist movement and post-independence language policies. I will then discuss multilingualism in Georgia, and the current debate surrounding minority rights. In the second, I will explore the relationship between language policy and language attitudes between generations in Georgia currently through analysis of interviews with a small sample of Georgians: I compare attitudes between the older generation that was raised under Soviet rule, and the younger generation that was raised in independent Georgia. The study focuses on attitudes towards Georgian, Russian and minority languages. While not intended to be a representational study, even this small sample of Tbilisi residents has yielded a valuable impression of linguistic attitudes in Georgia: language attitudes did not correspond with anti-Russian language policies since independence. The findings show that language remains at the heart of Georgians' identity for most, though slightly less so for the younger generation, but this does not affect the possibility to have positive attitudes towards Russian or minority languages. Ultimately, maintaining one's linguistic identity is not incompatible with a favorable perception of other languages. And in a democratic context, attitudes can be translated into voting preferences which opens the possibility to reversing anti-Russian language policies and improving cultural and political relations.

## Chapter 1: Historical Context

Familiarity with the history of the Georgian nation and its relationship with Russia is essential for understanding the nature of language attitudes in Georgia today towards the Georgian and Russian languages as well as minority languages. The relationship is deeply rooted in many centuries of interaction – beginning with Georgia under the Russian empire to the Soviet period, Georgia and the Caucasus region as a whole underwent a series of marked and long-lasting changes to its linguistic configuration. With the delimitation of the region and the instatement of national self-determination of each part, following by the reversal of these policies and the widespread Russification and the eventual loss of Soviet power, the effect of the Soviet-era language policies cannot be understated. What was reversed in policy in the end of the Soviet period and continued into independence was not eliminated so quickly from the consciousness of the people and their language attitudes. In reviewing the key trends in policies of these periods, as well as considering the language myths that were fostered in relation to national identity and pride, we can better consider the interplay of language attitudes in Georgia today.

### ***1.1 Early State Formation and under the Russian Empire***

The Caucasus was as rich linguistically from its very early history, with hundreds of languages spoken around the first century BC. The 11<sup>th</sup> Century historian Leonti Mroveli says that there were several languages used in central Georgia under the reign of King P'arnavaz in the third century BC, but that the king had extended the Georgian language to make it the only spoken tongue in the land. Later historians give a more nuanced view that use of Georgian was differentiated; that there was the presence of bilingualism in some areas, and that in Mingrelia



and Abkhazia only the elite had knowledge of Georgian.<sup>6</sup> Still, the role of the Georgian language as the region's *lingua franca* was of great value and historical importance to Georgians.

It was against this backdrop of a long history of Georgian language dominance that much of Georgian territory was absorbed into the Russian Empire in 1801 and the Russian language overtook Georgian as the official language of administration and the Church. In 1840, Georgian was eliminated as an official language in state business despite the fact that Russian was not widely spoken or understood at that time.<sup>7</sup> It was in the period between the 1860s -1910s that the Russian language and Russian national values were really elevated and an intensified effort was made to make the empire culturally unified. Celebration of the works of nationally celebrated Russian writers and poets such as Alexander Pushkin were also important vehicles of the promotion of and attachment to the Russian language; at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Pushkin's writings were even a "validator of its national self worth" and carriers of the moral and political interests of the nation."<sup>8</sup> The idea was to instill a "common love for the fatherland" and that the language would function as the "single cement" of this emotional and cultural unification. The resulting strategy took into account the cultural complexity of the empire, and thus combined Russification with nativization.<sup>9</sup> An example of this was the Russian Empire's policy of promoting the development of writing systems of the minority languages of Svan, Mingrelian and Abkhaz was seen by the Georgians as the deliberate weakening of the importance of the

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<sup>6</sup> Smith, Graham; Law, Vivien; Wilson, Andrew; Bohr, Annette; Allworth, Edward, "Language myths and the discourse of nation-building in Georgia," in *Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities*, Cambridge University Press, 1998: 170.

<sup>7</sup> Suny, Ronald Grigor, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, London, 1989: 72.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, Michael G. *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR 1917-1953*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 1998: 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid: 26-27.

Georgian language and dividing the country politically for it to be easier for the Russian Empire to rule.

In 1917, the South Caucasus was ruled by the Armenian Dashnaks, the Muslim Democratic Part of Azeri Musavets, and Georgian Mensheviks. The South Caucasus countries' support for the Bolshevik Revolution rested on the guarantees to the right to equality of all people and to self-determination, enshrined by the 1917 Bolshevik document *Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia*.<sup>10</sup> The region was originally one republic but was later dissolved when the Republic's Assembly disbanded in 1918. Georgia declared independence first, Armenia and Azerbaijan followed. Georgia signed a treaty with the Soviet Union in May 1920 that recognized independence and an international border.<sup>11</sup> With the newfound independence, Georgians quickly rebelled against the previous Russian-promoting language policies— in the brief period of independence from 1918-1921 before annexation to the USSR, all the policies of Russification were reversed, including naming Georgian as the sole language of territory, Tbilisi State University was founded as a Georgian-language institution, and the mass conversion of Russian typewriters into Georgian script was ordered just days after the declaration of independence.<sup>12</sup> The pact between Georgia and the USSR was broken when the Red Army entered Georgian territory in February 1921, ultimately ending the country's independence for the next 70 years.

The tension between Russification and retaining linguistic dominance over the region was of critical importance to the survival of Georgian nationhood; Russians' attempt to affect the writing systems of the Georgian linguistic minorities was seen by some Georgians as a threat. The quick reversal of Russification policies exemplifies the importance of maintaining Georgian

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<sup>10</sup> Grenoble, Lenore A., *Language Policy in the Soviet Union*, Kluwer Academic Publishers 2003: 36.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid: 112.

<sup>12</sup> Smith *et al* 1998: 170-171.

as the official language. This period demonstrates the extent of how deeply rooted and essential the struggle between the two linguistic forces is to the relationship between the two nations, in that linguistic prominence was not only is an outward indicator of the means of communication of the region, but also the means by which national identity was fostered and solidified. This tension, characterized by its attachment to identity contributes to modern language attitudes in the way history is taught and perceived. The interplay of these forces in the Soviet period and after are built on this historical foundation.

## **1.2 Beginnings of Soviet Rule to Stalinism**

The early Soviet policy of *korenizatsiia*, or nativization that followed from national delimitation was the only one of its kind in being the first to institutionalize ethno-territorial federalism.<sup>13</sup>

Language policy was central to this process, as in the formation of the Soviet Union as throughout its administration. It was aimed to promote the national self-determination of each of the member republics, establishing the native language of the region as official in government and in society, as well raising literacy and educational levels rapidly to foster equally fast industrialization,<sup>14</sup> all the while promoting the cultural customs and tradition of each republic. It sought to reverse the legacy of imperialism by the Russian Empire, and thus instated policies that would give preference to the titular nationality in the republic for government posts, and placed Russians at a disadvantage.

All of this was based on the concept that national identity was a transitory aspect of society connected to capitalism, which would be overtaken by socialism at a more advanced state.

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<sup>13</sup> Slezkine, Yuri, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, of How a State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 1994: 415.

<sup>14</sup> Grenoble 2003: 2.

National identity, if tolerated and not suppressed, the logic went, would naturally wither away and give way to socialism where class was the supreme defining aspect of society. Moreover, promoting nationality under this logic could still promote socialism, as the slogan “nationalist in form, socialist in content” illustrated. The substance of the promotion of socialism usurped the secondary aspect of its delivery – the form, or language.<sup>15</sup> National self-determination was then a transitory phase on the way to internationalism, and an inevitable *sblizhenie* (convergence) and *sliianie* (fusion) of nations.<sup>16</sup> Thus, a policy of double assimilation was employed: in promoting one’s own culture, one would also be promoting Soviet nationhood.

Language for Soviet ethnographers was one of the major criteria for identifying nationalities, and they created a formal ABCD language hierarchy allocating according to the size of the group, presence of an established written orthography, and territorial unification. Smith argues that this classification resulted in the normative judgment of which languages were superior and which inferior; thereby placing them into positions of either dominance or submission.<sup>17</sup> Despite various negative consequences of this categorization, there was a dramatic rise in literacy: literacy levels rose from an estimated 24 percent in 1897 under tsarist Russia to 81.2 percent in the Soviet Union in 1939.<sup>18</sup>

The delimitation process in the Caucasus was complex, particularly in the North Caucasus. Stalin’s Commissariat of Nationalities (Narkomnats) followed the original idea to make the region part of a broad regional state rather than separate republics. In 1921, Narkomnats

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<sup>15</sup> Grenoble 2003: 41.

<sup>16</sup> Martin, Terry, “An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism,” in *A State of Nations*, Oxford University Press, 2001: 69-70; Slezkine 1994: 421; Lewis 1972: 64; Smith, Michael G. *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR 1917-1953*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 1998: 3.

<sup>17</sup> Grenoble 2003: 46; Smith 1998: 5.

<sup>18</sup> Grenoble 2003: 46.

established two autonomous republics – the Gorskii and Dagestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs). But by 1924, Gorskii republic was divided up into six smaller oblasts.<sup>19</sup> This division atomized the region in that the peoples under this plan were no longer united by language or territory. In the South Caucasus, the situation was in some regard simpler and the dynamics somewhat reversed: the three prominent ethnicities and languages, Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani were integrated into the Transcaucasus Republic in 1922. The three gained SSR status in 1936, when the Transcaucasus Republic broke up.<sup>20</sup> While the Soviet language policies in the delimitation and nativization campaign no doubt divided and profoundly changed the political and social dynamics of the region, some scholars claim that the Soviets’ reconfiguration of the region is overstated. Smith argues that the Soviets did not construct new subgroups of languages where they did not exist before, and that “such an interpretation would comically exaggerate the power of the Soviet government to resolutely plan languages and manipulate the subtle questions of language reform, or to spontaneously shape the characters and destinies of whole Caucasian ... peoples. Rather, the government simply chose to promote selected patterns of linguistic and ethnic separation already in place.”<sup>21</sup> This selection of linguistic and ethnic separation, argued by some to be a “divide and conquer” agenda seeking to counter the threat of the region’s organization along religious or pan-ethnic lines,<sup>22</sup> others interpret it to be sincere “ethnophilia,” that the promotion of ethnic particularism would win the trust of previously downtrodden and exploited nations.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Smith 1998: 49.

<sup>20</sup> Grenoble 2003: 112.

<sup>21</sup> Smith 1998: 50.

<sup>22</sup> Hirsch, Francine, “Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 59, No. 2, 2000: 201; Fierman, William, “The Soviet ‘Transformation’ of Central Asia,” in *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*, Westview Press, 1991: 17; Smith 1998: 48.

<sup>23</sup> Slezkine 1994: 414-415.

The implementation of the nativization policies themselves was complex and costly. Newspapers and other government printed materials were sometimes two to three times as expensive to publish as materials in Russian; efficiency and profit were sacrificed for the policy's ideals. It was part of the greater vision of the policy that there would also be reverse bilingualism, which meant that the Russian public officials living and working in the peripheries would learn the native language of the republic.<sup>24</sup>

Georgia's was an unusual situation in that it had a long history of the prominence of the language in the region, including a historically very high literacy rate and resistance to the imposition of Russian in general.<sup>25</sup> Nativization policies in Georgia meant that the Georgian language enjoyed official status in the 1924 Constitution of the Georgian SSR,<sup>26</sup> and was promoted throughout the education system and doctoral dissertations could be written and defended in either Russian or Georgian. The universities in Georgia were even free to award higher degrees without getting approval from Soviet authorities in Moscow for several decades.<sup>27</sup> For Georgia, as for most of the newly Soviet republics, this period allowed extensive freedom and development of the national language and culture without threat of takeover.

By the late 1920s and 1930s however, nativization policies were no longer sustainable. While not revoked, nativization was no longer seen as the most important goal in and of itself, and was diminished and finally phased out. In his 1934 Party Congress address Stalin proclaimed that the biggest danger to the country was not Russian chauvinism, but rather unchecked emerging nationalism. The policies, though did not officially declare total reversal, amounted to the

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<sup>24</sup> Grenoble 2003: 115.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid: 115.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid: 117.

<sup>27</sup> Smith *et al* 1998: 171.

imposition of Russification and switch from Latin based script to Cyrillic.<sup>28</sup> The nativization policies had not offered enough cohesion among the nation and Russian was already the language of more than half of the population of the country as well as the language with the greatest geographical reach. Thus the Friendship of People metaphor was employed to begin its nation-building project: to forge a new common identity, to create the “New Soviet Man.”<sup>29</sup> It was for this reason that the Russian language took on a more important role than simply that of interethnic communication: it was also the tool of cultural and spiritual integration.<sup>30</sup> The teaching of the Russian language, instated as obligatory in all non-Russian schools in 1938,<sup>31</sup> received robust funding and aimed to instill an emotional bond to the Russian language and customs. It was at this time another language hierarchy was developed, also with four tiers. The lowest did not enjoy any official financing, the third received some financing but did not have official status, the second was made up of the titular languages that had official status in each of their Union Republic. The first tier was reserved for Russian only, which became the only official language for legal, administrative and educational functions.<sup>32</sup>

While Russian was being imposed in the USSR as a whole, in the 1930s the Georgian language enjoyed relative autonomy and even revival. It was granted the status of a state language in 1936. Under Stalin and Beria, both Georgians (Beria being a Mingrelian from Abkhazia), Georgianization once again took hold, with native language schools in Abkhazia and Ossetia shut down and Georgian script introduced for both languages in 1938.<sup>33</sup> There were a few

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<sup>28</sup> Grenoble 2003: 54.

<sup>29</sup> Martin 2001: 81.

<sup>30</sup> Kriendler, Isabelle, “Forging a Soviet People: Ethnolinguistics in Central Asia,” In Fierman, William; *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*, Westview Press, 1991: 221.

<sup>31</sup> Slezkine 1994: 443; Grenoble 2003: 60.

<sup>32</sup> Grenoble 2003: 3-4.

<sup>33</sup> Smith *et al* 1998: 171.

attempts at starting Mingrelian language newspapers 1935 -1936, but the effort was abandoned in 1938 and Georgian continued to be the written language for Mingrelians.<sup>34</sup> By the 1950s, more people than ever were educated in Georgian than ever before, with illiteracy largely eradicated. Primary, secondary, and university education was institutionalized and there were state-sponsored folk dance troupes, operas, Georgian language films, and literature.<sup>35</sup>

While nativization policies were reversed in the rest of the Soviet Union, the fact that Georgia was allowed to not only continue the extensive use of the Georgian language but also expand to use Georgian script for Abkhaz and Ossetian marked a period where Georgian language influence and dominance was protected, a continuity that was only broken after the Stalinist period. The freedom that Georgia enjoyed both during the early nativization policy as well as under Stalin exemplify a period of coexistence between Georgian remaining the key language of use while also having the presence of Russian as well. The period that followed once again broke this balance, which consequently triggered a forceful response.

### ***1.3 Post-Stalinism and Georgian Nationalist Movement***

The changes that the Post-Stalinist period brought were marked in nearly every sphere, as it meant an opening from Stalin's draconian and brutal rule. While the course of language policy was not changed as a whole, it was for Georgia: the Russification it had escaped under Stalin began to be enforced. The freedom the Georgian language was enjoying was suddenly cut off, to give way to increasing Russification, of Georgian as well as minority languages. The mounting imposition of Russian gave rise to the revival and consolidation of the Georgian nationalist movement, which aimed to reclaim Georgian nationhood, and an indispensable part of that was

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<sup>34</sup> Grenoble 2003: 120.

<sup>35</sup> Suny 1989: 281.



preservation of the national language. This movement's success is exemplified by the policies adopted by the state in the 1980s. Language myths, or beliefs people hold about language, were used in the period of independence to foster more support for the nationalist movement. It is interesting to consider the content of these myths and see if they are reflected in today's language attitudes. The empirical part of this study will examine this.

While Stalin's death in 1953 brought about many changes in the country, the central language policy goal remained to establish Russian as the second national language of the Soviet Union though not suppressing national languages.<sup>36</sup> The policy of mandatory Russian education remained in place for largely the rest of the Soviet period, which resulted in most of the population having at least some knowledge of Russian, with high rates of bilingualism. In this period, Georgian's position as the dominant language in the country was diminished in favor of the strengthening of minority languages, and the Cyrillic script was introduced for the Abkhaz and Ossetian languages, moving away from Georgian script. Russian was promoted, but alongside minority languages: courses were developed in Abkhaz language and literature and Russian language and literature, for example; the same was done with Ossetian, Azeri, and Armenian. These policies contributed to fostering animosities that ultimately spilled over into armed conflict after the dissolution of the USSR.

Resentment at Soviet-imposed Russification grew in Georgia as elsewhere in the USSR, and Georgians became increasingly determined to reassert the dominance of the Georgian language in the 1970s.<sup>37</sup> In the Soviet period, Georgian dissidents campaigned used the slogan “ena, mamuli, sartsmunoeba,” or “language, fatherland, faith,” revealing the core elements of the

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<sup>36</sup> Grenoble 2003: 57.

<sup>37</sup> Suny 1989: 310.

Georgian identity coined in the 19th Century by celebrated Georgian writer Ilia Chavchavadze and others.<sup>38</sup> In 1976 Eduard Shevardnadze, then the minister of education in Georgia, began speaking out openly for the promotion of Russian as the principal language used in secondary education, as well as the language in which doctoral dissertations should be written and defended. This was vehemently opposed and the tensions escalated in 1978, when the Soviet government attempted to change the portion of the constitution that made Georgian the official language of the republic. Hundreds of students began protesting in Tbilisi, others joined and the crowd was estimated to be at about 5,000 people.<sup>39</sup> The protests were successful in curbing the language legislation; the Soviets even called off the same measures in Armenia and Azerbaijan for fear of similar protests.<sup>40</sup>

These events helped consolidate the Georgian nationalist movement, which then led to the establishment of the Georgian Language Program in the 1980s that reaffirmed the language in the public life of the country, including education, politics, print and mass media. By 1989, 94 percent of children in Georgia were enrolled in Georgian language schools.<sup>41</sup> Further, the enactment of the 1989 State Program for the Georgian Language aimed to promote Georgian in various ways; among them was the promotion of teaching Georgian to ethnic minorities, the introduction of mandatory Georgian-language state exams for students of arts and technology, the requiring courses on Georgian language and literature for students in non-Georgian tracks of philological study, and the creation of a National Georgian Language Day, or “Day of the

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<sup>38</sup> Wheatley, Jonathan, “The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from Other European States,” European Centre for Minority Issues, March 2006: 4, [http://www.ecmi.de/download/working\\_paper\\_26.pdf](http://www.ecmi.de/download/working_paper_26.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Grenoble 2003: 118.

<sup>40</sup> Abrahamian 2006: 72; Arutuitonov, Sergei, “Linguistic Minorities in the Caucasus,” in Bratt Paulston, Christina and Peckham, Donald, *Linguistic minorities in Central and Eastern Europe*, Multilingual Matters, 1998: 103; Smith *et al* 1998: 171; Grenoble 2003: 118; Suny 1989: 319.

<sup>41</sup> Grenoble 2003: 118.

Mother Tongue,” April 14.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the program encouraged the publication of newspaper articles on the history of the language, its place in modern life and its purity.<sup>43</sup>

### **1.3.1 Language Myths in Georgia**

Moreover, language myths, defined by Smith *et all* as “widely held beliefs about the origins, history, and qualities of a language,” were fostered not by linguists but by the ruling elite, as they were by Gamsakhurdia used as part of the nation-building project. The beliefs people have about language influence the attitudes they have toward their own as well as foreign languages, and are crucial in the study of language policy.<sup>44</sup> Smith *et all* differentiate between *language-extrinsic* and *language-intrinsic* myths. The former are the beliefs based on external ideas about language, such as its origin or destiny, and the latter refers to features of the language itself, such as its purity, elegance, and superior ability to express concepts and emotions. In the Georgian case, extrinsic myths play a more central role as compared to the intrinsic ones. In part due to the work of the linguist Nikolai Marr, the myth of the “Urspache,” or that “our language is the original language of mankind,” one of several myths concerning primordiality, remains rather remarkably salient in Georgia. Another important extrinsic myth is that the Georgian language has a special destiny, different from other languages. This is particularly important for the Hebrew language for example, no doubt playing a role in it being the only successful spoken-language revival in history.<sup>45</sup> A primary text upholding this myth is that written by Ioane Zosime in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, titled *Praise and Glorification of the Georgian Language*, unique in its nature to Europe as a whole for the time period. This text was used in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by Gamsakhurdia to kindle

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<sup>42</sup> Smith *et all* 1998: 172.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid: 169.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid: 173-174.

<sup>45</sup> Gold, David, “A Sketch of the Linguistic Situation in Israel Today,” *Language in Society*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Sep., 1989), Cambridge University Press: 363-4; Nahir, Moshe, “Micro Language Planning and the Revival of Hebrew: A Schematic Framework,” *Language in Society*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Sep., 1998), Cambridge University Press: 335.

nationalism in the newly independent Georgia – while the Georgian language, as well as its people, have been oppressed, there is a messianic destiny in store for it ultimately. The importance of these myths was part of the empirical section of this study; in asking people their perceptions and attitudes of the Georgian language, I was able to examine the extent of their salience among my respondents [see Section 4.1].

The nationalist movement's success evolved into the mainstream government agenda with the solidification of an independent Georgia; the roots were planted with the resistance to the Soviets and the language policies that grew out of them continued in the same course. While some have attributed this to political realignment only and not a shift in attitudes, others argue that there is an intention to foster negative attitudes towards Russian.

#### ***1.4 End of Soviet Rule and Independence***

Language has played an important role in the assertion of independence and “otherness” for the states that formed after Soviet collapse. While not all states chose anti-Russian policies, negative attitudes towards Russian seemed to be ubiquitous and visitors were advised against using Russian in many countries the post-Soviet space for fear of offense taken at the sound and use of the language. While it is clear that language policies have become politicized, Russian's absolute decline in attitudinal terms is not obvious. In the case of Georgia where the relationship with Russia has deteriorated to the point of armed conflict in 2008 and policies have tried to demote the status of Russian in favor of English, the expected negative attitude is not as severe as could be expected. The study of language attitudes is important in this context in that they can give a more accurate portrayal of the society's views, which in turn can help inform policies to take a different turn.

The Gorbachev era perestroika policies allowed a domino effect of Soviet Socialist Republics taking advantage of the increasing decentralization and reintroducing titular language policies. The Soviet government unsuccessfully tried to enact a law that for the first time made Russian the official state language in 1990, only a year before the regime collapsed.<sup>46</sup> Language policy in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union was central in the transition of many from Soviet Socialist Republics into formation of independent countries. Most of the newly independent countries were multiethnic, and a shift in language policy away from Russian was often the most visible and audible way to change political direction and redefining national identity in the international sphere. For some parts of the former USSR, this process was stronger than in others: the trauma that the Soviet system left on its republics even at times resulted in the phenomenon of “political aphasia,” the psychological inability to speak a language from shock or trauma, in this case, Russian.<sup>47</sup> This was particularly the case for Latvia, Estonia, and Ukraine, all of which had significant Russian speaking minorities and used the elevation of the titular language to build nationhood on principles of civic citizenship. The situation in the Caucasus was fairly different than in Latvia, Estonia and Ukraine in that it had fewer Russians (or non-Caucasus-native Russian speakers), though language remained a salient issue in the nation-building project. The official languages in Armenia and Azerbaijan are the titular languages; in Georgia Article 8 of the 1995 constitution established Georgian and Abkhazian as official languages.<sup>48</sup> Knowledge of Russian continues to be common in the Caucasus, though different policies toward the Russian language have emerged within the three South Caucasus countries. Azerbaijan has maintained the prominence of Russian with the continuation of Russian-language

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<sup>46</sup> Grenoble 2003: 63.

<sup>47</sup> Abrahamian 2006: 74.

<sup>48</sup> Constitution of Georgia, available at [http://www.parliament.ge/files/68\\_1944\\_951190\\_CONSTIT\\_27\\_12.06.pdf](http://www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf) (accessed April 19, 2010).

schools, and some of the educated elite continue to have superior command of Russian than the titular language.<sup>49</sup> Armenia, also adopted policies in the 1990s that discouraged the use of the Russian language, which, was ultimately aimed against Russian-speaking Armenians, ethnic Russians in the country were scarce.<sup>50</sup> However, beginning in 1999 and again in 2002 Russian's place was elevated in the Armenian educational system as well as in the social and cultural spheres.<sup>51</sup> Georgia rejected the use of Russian in the public sphere, as was demonstrated by the fierce opposition to Eduard Shevardnadze's pro-Russian language stance and establishment of pro-Georgian language policies.<sup>52</sup>

However, with the decline of the use of Russian in many post-Soviet states, President Putin declared 2007 the "Year of the Russian Language," in hopes of reviving its status as a prominent world language. Whether or not this initiative had success is arguable, but there is evidence that attitudes toward the Russian language in some former Soviet states is actually improving, or perhaps improved for a period. According to Gallup polls conducted in 2006 and 2007, the results indicate that people's attitudes toward Russian are actually more positive in Georgia, Armenia and Moldova.<sup>53</sup> The most interesting of these is Georgia, which will be discussed in the following section.

### ***1.5 Language Policy in Georgia***

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<sup>49</sup> Arutunian 1998: 104-105.

<sup>50</sup> Abrahamian 2006: 73.

<sup>51</sup> Decision of the Armenian Government # 138, on "Establishing state program on language policy in the Republic of Armenia," 18 February 2002, <http://www.edu.am/ArticleIndex.php?id=425&topMenuArt=-1> (accessed May 26, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> Arutunian 1998: 102.

<sup>53</sup> Gradirovski, Sergei and Esipova, Neli, "Russian Language Enjoying a Boost in Post-Soviet States," August 1, 2008: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/109228/russian-language-enjoying-boost-postsoviet-states.aspx> (accessed April 23, 2010).

Georgia's language policy since independence must be seen in the greater political and economic context; it cannot be viewed in isolation. Georgia's path to regaining statehood was tumultuous: after declaring independence in 1991 under the leadership of nationalist-minded president Gamsakhurdia, the country deteriorated into civil war, with armed conflicts in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, between local separatists and the central Georgian government. Gamsakhurdia was ousted in 1992 in a violent *coup d'état* and Eduard Shevardnadze, former Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, replaced him. During this period, the country was in a state of economic disarray – it was part of the ruble zone and subsequent coupon system until 1994, when the independent currency, the lari, was introduced. Civil war continued until 1995; that year Shevardnadze was formally elected as president. Abkhazia and South Ossetia were left *de facto* under Russian control and the conflicts remained largely frozen until the armed conflict of August 2008. Shevardnadze, though reelected in 2000, was forced to resign in 2003 following the peaceful “Rose Revolution” that exposed electoral fraud in that year's parliamentary elections. Mikheil Saakashvili came to power as a result of the Rose Revolution and maintained a very pro-Western stance, moving toward NATO membership. Despite major efforts to eradicate corruption and build democratic institutions, the government has overstepped rights and freedoms in many instances, such as the use of force in the November 2007 election protests<sup>54</sup> and use of internationally prohibited cluster munitions in the August 2008 armed conflict with Russia.<sup>55\*</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Crossing the Line: Georgia's Violent Dispersal of Protesters and Raid on Imedi Television,” December 2007, <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2007/12/19/crossing-line> (accessed April 24, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Up in Flames: Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia,” January 2009, <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/01/22/flames-0> (accessed April 24, 2010).

\*Cluster munitions were employed by both Russian and Georgian forces.

When Georgia eliminated Russian as an official language at the end of the Soviet period, knowledge of Georgian became more important and Russian-speakers had to either start learning the language or leave the country. However, unlike in Estonia and Latvia, Georgia took a step towards civic citizenship in granting all of its residents automatic citizenship, regardless of language spoken or ethnicity (the zero principle).<sup>56</sup> Still, there was a massive influx of migration in the early independence period. Numbers of Russians (or Russian-speakers) living in Georgia fell drastically from 7.3 percent in 1989 to 1.7 percent in 2002.<sup>57</sup> As a result of this, Russian was regarded by some with contempt.<sup>58</sup> English became the new second language that was required for professional posts, and has since continued to gain much popularity and prestige. The younger generation studies Russian but is more encouraged to learn English and studies have shown a decrease in proficiency in Russian in Georgia.<sup>59</sup>

Likewise, the mass media sphere also changed correspondingly – previously available Moscow broadcast television was replaced by Georgian channels and Moscow channels became available only through satellite or cable. However, during this time, much of the programming continued to be shown with Russian interpreting. By 2004, all major Georgian channels have eliminated use of Russian and show their programming in Georgian.<sup>60</sup> Most recently, the Georgian government is preparing amendments to its law “On State Support to National Cinematography”

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<sup>56</sup> Korth, Britta; Stepanian, Arnold and Muskhelishvili, Marina; “Language Policy in Georgia with a Focus on the Education System,” Cibera, April 2005: 22.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid: 13.

<sup>58</sup> Arutunianov 1998: 105.

<sup>59</sup> Gavrilov, K., Kozievskaya, E., Yaschenko, E., «Русский язык в новых независимых государствах: текущее состояние и перспективы» (The Russian Language in the New Independent States: the Present situation and Prognosis), Экономическое обозрение 1/2008, Фонд «Наследие Евразии» [http://www.dcenter.ru/eaes/policy/200801\\_1.pdf](http://www.dcenter.ru/eaes/policy/200801_1.pdf) (accessed April 24, 2010):1.

<sup>60</sup> Korth *et al* 2005: 7.



that would require all foreign films to be dubbed into Georgian starting January 2011.<sup>61</sup> The presence of more international English speaking print media has also increased. Language use in advertising also was regulated. The law on advertisement 18.2.98 (amendment 14.3.98) requires any non-Georgian script to be accompanied by the Georgian equivalent (also in size). This is followed strictly in Tbilisi, but in the provinces Russian advertising can still be found.

For higher education, however, the policy remained more liberal. As late as 2005, students could conduct their bachelor's level studies in Georgian or Russian, while taking Georgian language lessons. Master's level programs were offered only in Georgian and sometimes English. However, defending a master's thesis in Russian was still permitted at this time. These policies, while aimed at transitioning towards an all-Georgian language education system, allowed those with insufficient Georgian language skills the ability to earn higher degrees in Russian as late as in 2005. While the phasing out of spoken Russian has had success, the presence of extensive specialized Russian language subject libraries in universities prevents Russian from being eliminated entirely from Georgian education. While English is gaining speed in Georgian education, the ability to use the resources from Russian language libraries remains important for higher education.

While language policies in Georgia are decidedly anti-Russian, as previously mentioned, this does not necessarily correspond to negative attitudes toward the language among the population. Gallup polls show that the number of people who think that it is very important for the younger

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<sup>61</sup> Kozlov, Vladimir, "Georgia to Ban Films in the Russian Language," April 22, 2010, THR International, [http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/hr/content\\_display/world/news/e3i3a5fb1561d2145a38d9aa5667e982f0b](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/hr/content_display/world/news/e3i3a5fb1561d2145a38d9aa5667e982f0b) (accessed April 24, 2010); "Sitting of the Committee on Education, Science and Culture," Parliament of Georgia, April 15, 2010, [http://www.parliament.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=ENG&sec\\_id=1292&info\\_id=27388](http://www.parliament.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=1292&info_id=27388) (accessed April 25, 2010).

generation to know Russian grew from 43 percent in 2006 to 64 percent in 2007.<sup>62</sup> The historical path of language policies did not correspond precisely with attitudes that resulted. The prevalence of Georgian language dominance and reversal of Russification policies did not seem to equal wholly negative attitudes towards Russian. The empirical part of this study aimed to uncover a more up-to-date impression of the attitudes, as the political developments have taken a turn for the worse.

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<sup>62</sup> Gradirovski and Esipova 2008.

## Chapter 2: Multilingualism in Georgia

This study not only focuses on the tension between attitudes towards Georgian and Russian languages, but also minority languages in Georgia. These attitudes are important in gauging the status and perception of linguistic communities in Georgia. Famously called “a little empire” by prominent Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov,<sup>63</sup> Georgia has been criticized for behaving with its minorities the same way the Soviet Union behaved with theirs.<sup>64</sup> Yet the nature of this relationship is complex and is deserving of attention: it drives at the heart of the nature of nationhood and identity. It is an important relationship politically in that on one hand, alignments of minority regions have led to separatism and conflict, while on the other, the treatment of minorities has become a kind of litmus test for the West for a healthy pluralist democracy. Often language is the deciding issue.

In order to consider the study of language attitudes towards minority languages, as well as become acquainted with the modern debate surrounding linguistic minority rights, we must first consider the linguistic diversity in Georgia as well as the current debate about minority language rights. There are both ethno-linguistic minorities; i.e., the Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities, whose languages belongs to the Indo-European and Turkic language families respectively, as well as the linguistic minorities of Svan, Laz, and Mingrelian that are ethnic Georgians also bilingual in Georgian, and maintain at once cultural and national ties to Georgia as well as their regions. Abkhaz, the official language in the breakaway region of Abkhazia, belongs to the

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<sup>63</sup> Petersen, Alexandros, “The 1992-93 Georgia-Abkhazia War: A Forgotten Conflict,” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2 (4) Autumn 2008: 11.

<sup>64</sup> Smith *et al* 1998: 172.

north-western Caucasian language family and has undergone changes to its script from the Latin alphabet in 1928 to Georgian in 1938 to Cyrillic in 1954.<sup>65</sup>

## **2.1 Mingrelian, Svan and Laz**

It is helpful to consider some background on the linguistic nature of these groups: the South Caucasian, or the Kartvelian group, is made up of Georgian, Svan, Laz and Mingrelian. Some linguists group Laz and Mingrelian under one subgroup Zan, or even dialects of as one language (Zan).<sup>66</sup> Linguistically, they are fairly closely related but not intelligible; there continues to be a debate about whether or not Mingrelian and Svan are dialects of Georgian or languages in their own right. The groups view themselves as having distinct cultural identities. Mingrelians are larger in number and live primarily in the western part of Georgia and previously in Abkhazia. They are bilingual in Georgian and do not see themselves as having a truly distinct cultural identity from Georgians, perhaps because they had been regarded by Soviets as all Georgians;<sup>67</sup> though Mingrelian is sometimes looked down upon as a provincial language.<sup>68</sup> Most Laz speakers actually reside in modern-day Turkey, with the exception of one Laz-speaking community living along the Black Sea on the border with Turkey.<sup>69</sup> Svan is spoken by an estimated 80,000 people living in the high mountains of Svanetia, as well as in the regions of Mestia and Lentekh and Abkhazia. The Svan language is an important component of speakers' cultural identity but is not written with the exception of documenting and publishing local folklore. They are also bilingual and use Georgian as a written language. Soviet linguists

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<sup>65</sup> Matveeva, Anna, "The South Caucasus nationalism conflict and minorities," Minority Rights Group, 2002: 7.

<sup>66</sup> Grenoble 2003: 115; Suny 1989: 4.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid: 120.

<sup>68</sup> Arutunov 1998: 105-106.

<sup>69</sup> Comrie, Bernard, *The Languages of the Soviet Union*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1981: 196.

previously regarded all of these as dialects of Georgian, as it was the only one that has had a long and rich literary tradition that dates back to the 5<sup>th</sup> Century and the *lingua franca* of the region.<sup>70</sup>

## **2.2 The Minority Rights Discourse**

Linguistic minority rights are a contemporary issue that is steadily gaining influence in the discourse of liberal societies exploring issues of social justice and the state's role in promoting multiculturalism. For westward-looking nations like Georgia, becoming sensitized to the modern rhetoric and policies surrounding these issues can help its acceptance into this sphere of influence. Yet approaching these issues is not simple: there are real threats of conflict and separatism, so there is reason to exercise caution. The challenge arises of how to maintain a cohesive nation while giving the most minority rights possible. One approach is granting more linguistic autonomy, while another is increasing government-sponsored integration efforts to help foster a kind of civic nationhood over the traditional concept of the nation built on ethnicity.

Nowhere are these issues more salient than in the Caucasus, particularly in Georgia and Azerbaijan, where linguistic minorities are more significant than in predominantly monolingual Armenia. Georgia and Armenia represent somewhat different ends of the spectrum in the debate between the promotion of minority linguistic rights and ensuring fair equality of opportunity as titular speakers via assimilation. The definition of who a linguistic minority is has evolved in the Soviet and post-Soviet space. During the Soviet era, anyone who was not a native Russian speaker could be considered a linguistic minority, harboring resentment for imperialistic policies of Russification. Yet dynamics between linguistic groups inside the Republics were not equal,

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<sup>70</sup> Grenoble 2003: 16-17; Arutunian, Sergei, "Linguistic Minorities in the Caucasus," in *Linguistic minorities in Central and Eastern Europe*, Multilingual Matters, 1998: 98-99.

and Russians living in the South Caucasus could feel as a minority,<sup>71</sup> certainly since the breakup of the USSR, but even before.

Various international agreements have been developed on the issue of minority rights, which has granted them a more prominent place in the human rights debate as a whole. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,<sup>72</sup> the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities,<sup>73</sup> two Council of Europe agreements [the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM)<sup>74</sup> and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages<sup>75</sup>], the two OSCE documents: the Copenhagen Document of 1990,<sup>76</sup> and the Oslo Recommendations Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities.<sup>77</sup> The Oslo Recommendations advocate for a balance of protecting linguistic minorities while encouraging the participation of minorities in mainstream society;<sup>78</sup> they have supported the method of increased titular language instruction in linguistic minority regions. However the FCNM, of which Georgia is a signatory, maintains that linguistic minorities should have the right to deal with authorities in their language when appropriate.

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<sup>71</sup> Arutuitonov 1998: 102.

<sup>72</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 27, adopted through General Assembly resolution 2200A, March 23, 1976.

<sup>73</sup> United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, A/RES/47/135, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r135.htm> (accessed April 19, 2010).

<sup>74</sup> The Council of Europe, "The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities," February 1995, [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/1\\_AtGlance/PDF\\_H%281995%29010\\_FCNM\\_ExplanReport\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/1_AtGlance/PDF_H%281995%29010_FCNM_ExplanReport_en.pdf) (accessed April 19, 2010).

<sup>75</sup> The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, 1992, <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/Treaties/Html/148.htm> (accessed April 19, 2010).

<sup>76</sup> Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the [O]SCE '9 30, reprinted in 11 HUM. RTS. L. J. 232 (1990).

<sup>77</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "Oslo Recommendations Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities," 1 February 1998, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/category,LEGAL,OSCE,,,3dde546e4,0.html> (accessed April 19, 2010).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Of the three South Caucasus nations, Georgia is arguably the most ethnically diverse. Linguistic variety, while not aligning perfectly with ethnicity, is also a crucial element of the diverse nature of the country. Determining the number of Georgian-speakers is not simple because many speakers of other Kartvelian languages are recorded as Georgian-speakers. In the 1989 census, of the 3.78 million Georgian-speakers, approximately one million were estimated to be in fact Mingrelian-speakers. The next large minority in that census were the Armenians at about 8 per cent of the population or 437,000 people.<sup>79</sup> As in the Soviet era as well as after, ethnicity was linked to linguistic identity in the Caucasus. Russian, Armenian, Azeri and other minority languages are spoken in areas where minorities are concentrated, with Russian serving as the language of interethnic communication. The official language policy requires that all legal official proceedings and be carried out in Georgian in all national and local settings, with the exception of Abkhazian in Abkhazia. The law guarantees those without knowledge of Georgian an interpreter free of charge; however, in areas of minority concentration, like in the two Javakheti districts of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, where the population is overwhelmingly Armenian, and the Armenian language continues to be the de facto means of communication and Russian used to communicate with the central government administration,<sup>80</sup> though this is a violation of the law and has been cited to cause legal and integration difficulties. While some advocate the implementation of Georgian language instruction alongside the promotion of Georgian language policy, other groups have petitioned for official recognition of Armenian in these districts.<sup>81</sup> In terms of integrating linguistic minorities (mostly Azerbaijani and Armenian)

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<sup>79</sup> Smith *et al* 1998: 169-170.

<sup>80</sup> Wheatley 2006: 5-6.

<sup>81</sup> Popjanevski, Johanna, "Minorities and the State in the South Caucasus: Assessing the Protection of National Minorities in Georgia and Azerbaijan," Central Asia-Caucasus Silk Road Studies Program, September 2006: 25, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/Silkroadpapers/0609Popjanevski.pdf> (accessed April 18, 2010): 40-41.

into Georgian society, mostly NGOs and international organizations have taken the lead on teaching the minorities Georgian, though the government has also taken some action. A major difficulty referred to in the integration of these minorities is that often they have little to no contact with the Georgian population and lack motivation in learning the titular language.<sup>82</sup> In November 2009, the Georgian Committee on Culture, Science and Education moved to amendments on the law on higher education allowing individuals with knowledge of Azerbaijani or Armenian to more access to higher education in Georgia, and providing them with Georgian language instruction so that after one year they can continue their education in Georgian.<sup>83</sup> The number of Russian language schools is decreasing; most ethnic minorities outside the Samtskhe Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions opt to send their children to Georgian language schools. However, Russian remains an important means of interethnic communication and the presence of the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki maintains the economic utility of the language.

The other Kartvelian languages—Mingrelian, Laz and Svan—are not generally brought up in the linguistic minority debate in Georgia because they are bilingual in Georgian and tend to be educated in Georgian language schools, though the state's role in helping preserve these languages (or dialects) has been called into question. The empirical portion of this study addresses in more detail the language attitudes surrounding Mingrelian (and Abkhaz) because they are the biggest groups and elicited the most responses. While the responses on the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities were not sufficient for analysis, a question on granting linguistic minority status reflected a variety of opinions on the above issues, underscoring the perceived difficulty of balancing minority rights with national unity.

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<sup>82</sup> Korth *et al* 2005: 32.

<sup>83</sup> "Education, Science and Culture Committee Sitting," Parliament of Georgia, November 5, 2009, [http://www.parliament.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=ENG&sec\\_id=1292&info\\_id=25407](http://www.parliament.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=1292&info_id=25407) (accessed April 25, 2010).



### Chapter 3: Project Design and Methodology

The research project centers on whether or not the attitudes toward language in Georgian society correspond to the shift in language policies in Georgia and whether or not there are notable differences in these attitudes between generations. The study focuses not only on the attitudes that people have towards Georgian, Russian, but also the minority languages that are spoken in Georgia today, as they are central in understanding the political dynamics of a linguistically diverse nation which has been described as both the victim and perpetrator of language imposition. I aimed to find what the prevalent attitude toward the Russian language is in light of severed diplomatic ties and increasingly anti-Russian language policies. Additionally, I examined the attitudes towards the Georgian language to see if the heightened importance in political and public life that the Georgian language has been given since 1989 has had an effect on people's perceptions of their language. Finally, the crux of my research is to examine whether or not there is a difference between the language attitudes between generations and discover whether younger Georgians more linguistically nationalistic than the older generation.

I supposed that language attitudes would in fact in some way be connected to the policy changes and that the younger generation would be less linguistically nationalistic because they did not experience the imposition of Russian to the same extent that their parents' generation did. The result was that the hypothesis was to some extent true, that the older generation had more unanimous attachment to the language and the steps Georgians had taken to protect it. The key finding of the study revealed that strong feelings of attachment to the language as an integral component of identity does not prevent positive attitudes towards other languages, even those associated with major political and security problems. Positive attitudes towards Russian in

Georgia are significant because they can play a part in determining the future of relations between the countries if or when political hostility subsides. If attitudes towards the Russian language (and subsequently to the culture and literature of the country) remain positive throughout periods of political strife, it is more likely to affect a vote for a more Russian-friendly language policy, which could help reestablish good political and economic ties. Likewise, strongly linguistically nationalistic attitudes toward the Georgian language and that interplay between attitudes towards linguistic minorities can affect the policy discussion surrounding linguistic minority status.

Before considering the practical methodology of the study, it is useful to first address the theoretical approach I take in terms of defining attitudes. One approach in the study of language attitudes that was previously prevalent is that of the behavioralist definition of the attitude, which is that an attitude is only what can be overtly observed from the individual's behavior or responses. Another is the mentalist approach, where an attitude is defined as "a mental and neural state," which cannot be directly observed, but are inferred by an individual's introspection and reflection.<sup>84</sup> There are advantages and limitations to both: for example, the behavioralist approach is praised for having analytical objectivity for analyzing only observed behavior, but is criticized for its inability to isolate the desired effect on the subject as there is no way to determine what exactly causes someone to behave a given way. The more fundamental problem, however, is that the behavioralist viewpoint ignores the validity of the individual's expression of his or her opinions. This is what the mentalist approach offers, as well as being a variable independent of external physical factors, but has been critiqued for being too subjective in that the attitude is a "hypothetical construct" and is not quantifiable because it has no objective

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<sup>84</sup> Agheyisi, Rebecca and Fishman, Joshua A. "Language Attitude Studies: A Brief Survey of Methodological Approaches," *Anthropological Linguistics*, Vol. 12, No. 5, May, 1970: 138-139.

criteria by which to judge the responses.<sup>85</sup> The mentalist approach – also called the cognitive approach – relies on inferring an attitude based on what is shared by each person, a mental state that gives way to certain kinds of behavior. Despite potential problems with the validity of self-reported data, this is the most widely accepted and used approach in the study of language attitudes, and this is the approach I employ. While one's attitude as defined by what he or she expresses can be limited by one's own psychological awareness and is indeed difficult to quantify, I adopt the definition of an attitude as that which is reflected upon, formulated and expressed by an individual. Therefore, I used interviews as the primary tool in order to uncover individuals' attitudes as defined by my respondents themselves. I used the semi-structured interviewing technique allowed for the maximal expression of respondents' attitudes because they were able to articulate their thoughts and emotions in a way that was natural for them, as opposed to quantitative surveys with a more rigid manner of replying. While the question of measuring and quantifying responses to qualitative interviews can be problematic, trends in replies can be analyzed, and the spontaneous replies that the respondents give can give much more valuable information than overly rigid questionnaires with predetermined measurement schemes.

In order to investigate the questions I raised surrounding language attitudes, I conducted field research in Tbilisi May 1-11, 2010. All of my respondents were living near or in Tbilisi, though six were not native to the capital. All were educated to the university level. I divided up my study of the Georgians' attitudes into two generations: the older group was born between 1954-1963, and the younger group 1983-1986. I chose these years so that the older generation will have recollection of the 1978 protests and the younger generation will have been brought up and

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

educated mostly in the post-Soviet era, and will have grown up with direct experience with the implementation of the 1989 laws, including the establishment of Georgian Language Day. Both groups, of course, have experienced the 2008 armed conflict with Russia. My supposition was that because the older group would have the experience of living under the Soviet era, that they would have more sentiments of linguistic nationalism than the younger generation.

I used the snowball sampling method<sup>86</sup> to locate my respondents; beginning with the acquaintances of my colleagues and then their friends that fit my study profile. One clear drawback of using the snowball sampling method is that because respondents know one another, they are likely to have similar socioeconomic backgrounds and education, and can nominate friends who share their views and may consequently give similar replies. I attempted to mitigate this problem by asking different colleagues through which to find my respondents so they did not come from one group of acquaintances, and also for them to think of individuals who both did and did not share their views. In this way, I think the most detrimental limitation of the snowball sampling method were avoided. The other obvious shortcoming of snowball sampling that is true of all non-random methods of sampling is that it is inherently biased as it does not give an equal chance of all individuals being chosen for the sample and cannot be representative of the whole population, in this case, what language attitudes are among all Georgians, or even Georgians living in Tbilisi. While studies that aim to representative can have more far-reaching societal and policy implications, this was out of the feasibility of this project as it would require a significant financial and time commitment that was not possible. However, the small sample used allowed for in-depth replies that would not be possible without an ambitious investment of resources. The

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<sup>86</sup> Bernard, Harvey Russell, *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*, Sage 2000: 179.

findings of this study can then serve as a starting point for further research on this topic that could more accurately assess their place among other opinions in Georgia.

I interviewed eight individuals from each age group, with an equal gender balance in each age group; 16 in-depth interviews in total. I gave all of my respondents the option of conducting the interviews in English or Russian, whichever language the respondent was more comfortable in. Of the younger respondents, I conducted five of eight in English, and the rest in Russian. I conducted all of the interviews with the older respondents in Russian. That I used Russian as the language of the interview could have been a limitation, in that there would be the danger of automatically pre-selecting respondents that both had knowledge of and willingness to use Russian. However, I was aware of this as being a danger to the objectivity of my study, I was prepared to find an interpreter if I encountered an inability or an unwillingness to speak Russian, which I believe would have helped to eliminate some of the political undertones of the use of Russian. However, the use of Russian as the language of the interview was in no way a problem for my respondents. Even the five younger generation respondents I interviewed in English would have been willing to have the interview in Russian, and most opted for English simply because they knew English better. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to an hour and a half, and as previously stated, were semi-structured and qualitative in nature. I asked questions in the most neutral and open-ended way possible so as to elicit the most candid and complete response possible. If a question was too vague or not understood by my respondent, I rephrased it or encouraged them to speak freely about their own opinions. I recorded the interviews when possible and also took written notes during the interviews.

I divided my questionnaire into three parts: the first was concerning attitudes toward the Georgian language, the second on the Russian language, and the third part on minority languages

in Georgia. The Georgian language section included questions concerning identity, the importance of Georgian Language Day and open questions inviting language myth replies. Often they felt that I was looking for objective or scientific replies and stated that they were not qualified to give answers; it took some explanation that I was in fact looking for their personal opinions on these questions. The section on the Russian language was focused on whether there had been a personal or societal shift in the feeling toward Russian, feelings toward the 1978 protests, as well as associations with the language and practical use for it in Georgia today. I also asked whether the Russian language should be taught in public schools, and whether it should be a required subject. In the section on minority languages, I focused my questions on associations with the languages and opinions about whether or not the minority language groups should be granted special status on a regional government level.

## Chapter 4: Interview Analysis

### 4.1 Attitudes towards Georgian

Attitudes toward Georgian are important in that they reveal the extent to which language is an important part of one's national and cultural identity. Many questions were designed to evoke language myths, and though only one of the extrinsic myths mentioned in Smith *et al*'s work were mentioned by a respondent, the intrinsic myths – the ones referring to the internal characteristics like beauty, musicality, and uniqueness – were cited by all my respondents. Finding this, we can better understand the nature of the interaction of a strong attachment to one's own language and attitudes towards others.

#### 4.1.1 Language as Identity and Special Characteristics

Broadly speaking, there was a consensus among my respondents about the importance of the Georgian language as a marker of national identity. The most common replies included a sense of uniqueness of their language, its importance for self-expression, the importance of understanding of the culture and essence of Georgia. Notably these replies were unanimous among the older respondents, while some of the younger respondents did not exhibit such strong feelings of pride and attachment to their language, with some not making it a principle of identity. Of the older group, many used the word 'objazatelno' or 'required' or 'indispensible' when speaking about the role of language to their national identity, as well as "it's the first place," or "on the highest level." For example, Tato, a 52-year-old respondent stated that "it's indispensable, every nation is should speak their own language and think in their language. I think it's a necessity. Every person, every nation, should have a language. If he starts speaking

English [instead of Georgian], he is not Georgian, he's British.”<sup>87</sup> Zurab, also 53 years old, agreed and further underscored the importance of studying Georgian literature in Georgia and pointed to its importance in the formation of the Georgian character:

Those who went to Russian schools and learned the Georgian classics in Russian – none of them know who [the authors really] are, they will never understand it like the ones who learned it in Georgian. And their children cannot be pure Georgians – they may have the physical appearance and a Georgian last name, but spiritually [dushevno] they are not.<sup>88</sup>

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Most of the younger respondents also agreed on this subject, making clear that the notion of the link between language and nation is deeply rooted in their consciousness. Vika, a 26-year-old respondent replied that “[f]or me, language is the concept of the nation. Your language is your nation. Language is important because it's not just the language I speak – in it is everything: my patriotism, understanding of history, my understanding of myself.”<sup>89</sup> Other younger respondents saying that the language is one of the key things they use when describing their country abroad, and perhaps not as consciously. Levan G., a 26-year-old respondent stated that “I am my language, I've never thought about this part of my identity.”<sup>90</sup> Two younger respondents said that language was not that important, emphasizing more the ability of people to self-identify as they wish. One 24-year-old respondent, Esma, acknowledged the language's importance but was quick to reflect upon its international status: “... there is this pride, because my language is so unique...but on the other hand, it's only 4 million people who speak this language and it's not

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Tato Elisashvili, Tbilisi, May 10, 2010.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Zurab Adeishvili, Tbilisi, May 10, 2010.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Vika Giorgobiani, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Levan Ghambashidze, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.



useful outside the country. Of course we are proud of our language but on the international level it means nothing.”<sup>91</sup>

When asked about the special characteristics of Georgian and what makes it different from other languages, the most commonly cited answers were that it was a unique language in that it was independent, or not part of a larger language family group but instead the small Kartvelian (or Georgian language group), that it had a rich and ancient tradition with a unique writing system, and that Georgian sounds are so difficult to pronounce. When discussing the writing system, they also mentioned that there were three different alphabets that changed over history. Also mentioned were that it is a musical language and that it has many synonyms, and a difficulty of translating it into other languages. These features contribute to a sense of pride concerning the Georgian language and its relationship to other languages, as well as an appreciation for it and its place in the world’s cultural heritage. Otar, a 25-year-old respondent, said “I think losing or destroying [the Georgian language] would be a loss for the whole world.”<sup>92</sup> Nino T., a 49-year-old respondent, referred to the musicality of the language, and its ability to lend itself to poetry: “The literature, the poetry...the language is very musical – difficult, but very musical. And very rich. If you listen to the poetry, the music, [the] Georgian [language] is something apart, that is not like anything else. We feel this, all of it. It is a wise language... it is the muse of poetry and of song.”<sup>93</sup>

Of particular interest is the attitude in connection with the ability to pronounce difficult sounds. Three respondents claimed that the difficult pronunciation helps Georgians learn normally difficult sounds in other languages or even gives them the ability to learn any other language.

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<sup>91</sup> Interview with Esma Merikishvili, Tbilisi, May 3, 2010.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Otar Berdzenishvili, Tbilisi, May 5, 2010.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Nino Tsrekidze, Tbilisi, May 10, 2010.

Moreover, there was expressed a sense of pride or competition in that foreigners cannot produce many Georgian letters. Levan G. recalls his first experience abroad:

There are a lot of letters that we can say that we can make fun of foreigners for not being able to say. And we say only we can do this, and it's very good. There is one word that has 6 consonants in a row – mtsvrtneli [sports trainer]. It's cool only we can do this. Someone went to the moon, someone created the atom bomb, and we can say mtsvrtneli.

I remember when I was younger I felt like this. When I was abroad for the first time in Germany I presented my country, and when I asked for questions, there was silence. It was 1999. And then there was one guy, Stefan his name was, he asked me if we had vacuum cleaners. I was very upset. Of course I said yes, but I was very upset because of this question. Of course we didn't have them, there was no light, no electricity then. And then my counter-question was can you say mtsvrtneli? And then they said wow, that's cool, now we know your culture. But today it's also funny.<sup>94</sup>

While no doubt Levan's account was ironic and poking fun of his own excessive pride, but it was at once sincere. The ability to pronounce a word with 6 consonants was the way in which he was able to counter a question that in his eyes was disparaging to Georgia and hurtful to him. There was a counter opinion as well, challenging the validity of the pride of the special features of Georgian. According to Misha, a 24-year-old respondent, the pride that many Georgians feel does not make sense because it is not a personal achievement.

Many Georgians take pride in having an alphabet, they think they are cool. And also that Georgian is not part of a larger language family. Which I find kind of silly – it's not your personal virtue, or something that you did or created, it's just that you were born here, it's not some privilege. It's just a coincidence or fact that you are born here. To me, it's the same to take pride in having blue or green eyes, or being tall or short.<sup>95</sup>

#### ***4.1.2 Protests of 1978 and Georgian Language Day***

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Levan Ghambashidze, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Mikheil Svanidze, Tbilisi, May 3, 2010.

The language protests in 1978 where Georgians went to the streets to speak out against the Soviets' move to replace Georgian with Russian as the official language of Georgia were part of the collective consciousness of the vast majority of my respondents. This was the case both for those of the older generation who remembered – and many of whom participated in them – as well as for the younger generation. Five of the older generation respondents had personally participated in them. All of them remember the events with a very positive attitude, saying that it was this that saved the Georgian language. Of the younger respondents, only one did not know about these events. The others saw it as a heroic and important event that protected their country's language from a serious threat, one even saying that she does not think that “anyone would ever dare to try doing this again, even if Russia took over Georgia.”<sup>96</sup> Two others stated that these events were instrumental in consolidating the Georgian nationalist movements. Esma underscored the essence of the protests in that even the Russian-speaking elite participated:

At that time Russian was the elite language, and even the elites were protesting against the Russian language to be the official language. So you see how this intervenes with nation, nationality, identity. We know Russian, we speak Russian, we even use Russian to communicate between us, but still, we need the Georgian language to be the official language.<sup>97</sup>

The holiday that emerged on the basis of these events, Georgian Language Day, celebrated April 14 in the Mother Tongue Square in Tbilisi, was instated in 1989. When asked about this holiday, most had a positive association or attitude towards it, though only two actively celebrated it – one goes to the meeting and activities that are held in the square and the other goes to church, as for her the language has a religious meaning. Both were part of the older generation. Only two – both from the younger generation – did not know about the holiday's existence.

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Tatia Shavgulidze, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Esma Merikishvili, Tbilisi, May 3, 2010.

### 4.1.3 The Future of the Georgian Language

In speaking about their perception of the future of Georgian language, four of the younger respondents linked the fate of the language with the political fate of the state. Interestingly, three spoke of the possibility of the Georgian language ceasing to exist if the state were to collapse.

Eka, a 25-year-old respondent shared her thoughts on this possibility:

Sometimes when I am in a pessimistic mood, I think we will be...all over the world...when you have war once a year, you cannot connect yourself to your country...you have no stability. You cannot build a future. I connect the language with the politics – if we will lose our identity and mix ourselves with Americans or Russians, or whoever, we will lose ourselves [and the language].<sup>98</sup>

Others were more optimistic, saying that the language will always live and flourish, even that it will “last forever”<sup>99</sup> and “no one can touch the language.”<sup>100</sup> Otar, for example saw a more hopeful fate for the Georgian language:

Nothing will happen. Georgia has existed for a long time and many people have tried to change things and they haven’t been able to. There are some things that change but there are some things that are impossible to change, that exist in the consciousness of a person. I think as long as the Georgian exists, the language will exist.<sup>101</sup>

One older respondent claimed a messianic future for the language - that it will be the language of the second coming, and claimed that all Orthodox priests have recognized this.<sup>102</sup> There was also a concern with the loss of tradition; that the younger generation does not read or value the Georgian literary tradition as it used to be valued. And finally, there was a discourse surrounding the purity of the language and its being subject to change. While two referred to wanting to

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Ekaterine Tsereteli, Tbilisi, May 3, 2010.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Tatia Shavgulidze, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Levan Ghambashidze, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Otar Berdzenishvili, Tbilisi, May 5, 2010.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Papia Daredzhan, Tbilisi, May 7, 2010.

maintain the purity of the language in general terms, in other interviews two main agents of change were cited in driving the change in the language: international –mostly English— influence, and internal, peripheral Georgian influence that is perceived as ‘lower class’. While there were some opinions in favor and against accepting the natural evolution of the language with the international influence, the three respondents that referred to the peripheral Georgian—all from the younger generation—spoke out against certain influences that they perceive to be lower class and damaging the language.

Esma expressed that language is bound to change and saw its simplification a positive development:

Language is something like a living organism...it’s like me - sometimes I am fat, sometimes thin, sometimes I have hair growing, sometimes I cut it. I don’t see any tragedy in that language will change – it should change. It should be simplified, for normal people to use. There are some people who are upset about commas misplaced, I don’t care about that. But what will stay is the basis for your identity as a nation.<sup>103</sup>

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Similarly, Levan pointed to the use of international words as a necessity:

If we want to be a modern society, we have to use modern words. But, you have modern words if you create modern stuff, and we don’t create modern stuff. Western countries do, maybe China. So if we take these things we have to take the words too. Computers in the salons, iPod, google it. And many Georgian words will disappear because people will stop using them.<sup>104</sup>

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Tato, on the other hand did not see the development as a positive one, arguing that the less the language changed, the better: “I would like for it to stay pure, but there are a lot of international words. It would be better if we kept it the same as in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>105</sup> Zaharia, a 46-year-old

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Esma Merikishvili, Tbilisi, May 3, 2010.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Levan Ghambashidze, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Tato Elisashvili, Tbilisi, May 10, 2010.

respondent, also expressed that for him, “pure Georgian is nice to hear.”<sup>106</sup> A stronger desire to keep the language from changing in general terms as well as from international influence came from the respondents from the older generation; however, three respondents from the younger group expressed a fear of the Georgian language changing from peripheral Georgian communities. This is symptomatic of a certain class divide in Georgian society.

Vika expressed this view and explained where she thinks the change comes from:

I think that Georgian is at risk of extinction – maybe not now, but maybe in 50 years or so. There are a lot of new words, shortened words like in English. There is this problem with the periphery and provinces. Many people think that these changes come from the villages from the provinces, but I have been there and saw that that is not the case. It’s that the uneducated masses in the periphery of the city that bring these changes. ...I am very afraid of this happening.<sup>107</sup>

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Levan explained that the upper class urban dwellers had created the notion of a “village man,” which is a derogatory term for people who come from the provinces who come to Tbilisi, and they are perceived as uncultured and uneducated. He then referred to a specific linguistic change that was associated with the Mingrelian form of speech that is part of the “village man” stereotype.

[I]n the future, maybe 20 years, the sound l [hard l] will switch to l' [soft l]. Because of the influence from the regions. You know, half of Georgia’s population live in Tbilisi, and the capital used to generate modern Georgian culture. Now, there are many people coming from the regions and bring their own manner of speech, like from Mingrelian they say l' instead of l. We didn’t use it before, but they did. Like in my class out of 25 students, 10 use l'. Maybe in 20 years it will be normal, because politicians also come from the regions. I don’t like it, because I was taught different.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Zakharia Nadiradze, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Vika Giorgobiani, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Levan Ghambashidze, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.

Finally, Tatia, a 24-year-old respondent expressed disapproval of the mixing of languages, particularly Georgian and Russian, also indicating that this form of expression shows a lower level of education. She stated: “I think the mixing of Georgian and Russian is cheap, I don’t like it. It’s ruining both languages. It’s better to speak clear and correct Russian or clear and correct Georgian. The hairdressers, for example, the Russian or Armenians, mix it completely. This is low class I think.”<sup>109</sup>

The importance that most of my respondents attributed to the Georgian language as a primary and necessary aspect of their identity, as well as many exhibiting a sense of pride of the language for its unique features is in some way translated into a desire for its purity. While some respondents were content with the change in the language and felt confident in its basis to endure, others felt that outside influences – particularly ones that are generally regarded as threatening to the urban literary version, perceived as ‘higher class’ than others that come from the provinces of Georgia. My hypothesis that the younger generation would be less linguistically nationalistic was in some way true. While all of the older respondents were very much attached to their language as a marker of their identity, not all of the younger respondents were this attached, though nearly all stated that they were proud of their language. The strong ties to their language and national identity were to be expected, the relationship they had to Russian in addition to that is discussed in the following section.

## ***4.2 Attitudes towards Russian***

In the context of the increasingly tense relationship Georgia has had with Russia which have corresponded to anti-Russian language policies, the expected result is that attitudes will also

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with Tatia Shavgulidze, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.

correspond. However, previous surveys and research have shown that the picture with regard to attitudes is far from clear. Taking into account the Georgian language as a strong indicator of identity, as well as the tumultuous history of the two countries, attitudes towards Russian could be volatile. These findings show that a positive attitude towards Russian is a view that remains in Georgia, though more extensive research should be conducted to judge the breakdown of various views.

#### **4.2.1 Change in Attitude – Personal and Society**

In response to being asked about whether or not their personal attitude towards the Russian language has changed over time, all my respondents replied in the negative with very minor variation. They all cited respect and admiration for the Russian language and culture, and a common thread was response that they keep the feeling and attitude towards the language very separate from the political situation in the country. Comments on the rich literary tradition and the need to know the language of one's neighbor were the most frequent. Vika stated that the presence of Russian was so important that that the Russian language was essential for her education, and that knowledge of the Russian language had made European literature available to her until she learned English. Several respondents reiterated the idea that "The more languages one knows, the richer one is,"<sup>110</sup> or that "as many languages as you know is how many people you are."<sup>111</sup>

Otar explains how separate the worlds of politics and language are for him:

I worked as a translator for the U.S. army, I finished my work two days before the 2008 conflict began. But even so I never felt anything negative towards Russians or the language. I know that all these problems come from personalities. If their

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<sup>110</sup> Interview with Nodar Yesiava, Tbilisi, May 7, 2010.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Tatia Shavgulidze, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.



president is a bastard, it's not their fault. Moreover, I don't think that a *language* can be to blame for anything. It's a language that has Gorky, Chekhov. I think the biggest stupidity is to hate a *language*.<sup>112</sup>

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Tato underscores this divide as well, though also hinting at a slight shift towards the future generations' knowledge of the language:

[T]he events of 2008 left me with a hurt that of course that I still feel and will remain maybe for the rest of my life. Though this has nothing to do with the language. Because there were geniuses of the 19th Century – Dostoevskii, Chekhov that I love, that I enjoy reading in Russian. So I am not going to change my whole attitude towards the language over one idiot, Putin.

Should [Russian] be required [in schools]? If you had asked me that before the war, I would have said yes. But now, no. For my son, if he can learn both, all the better, but if there is a choice, I would choose English. But I'm not a dictator, he can decide for himself.<sup>113</sup>

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For them, the ability to read Russian classics in the original was a precious and important skill that they valued, and the political situation that was no doubt painful for many did not erase the value that the Russian literature held for them. However, Tato's attitude about his son's education does indicate a shift, however small, in the attitude for his son's knowledge of Russian.

From the perspective of the change in society, as expected, most respondents spoke of the changing country's orientation towards Western values and the European Union and subsequently are learning English over Russian now. Many more young people speak English and speak either poor or no Russian at all, even though Russian is still taught in primary schools. Several respondents claimed that this was a result of the country's changing international political and economic orientation and not because of a kind of hatred or aversion to the Russian

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<sup>112</sup> Interview with Otar Berdzenishvili, Tbilisi, May 5, 2010.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Tato Elisashvili, Tbilisi, May 10, 2010.

language, culture or people. Several cited Russian neighbors that they had growing up or people they knew who worked at bakeries or local enterprises who had never learned Georgian and got by well without it. Tatia had described that tolerating this amounted to Georgians not respecting their own language sufficiently and being too accommodating to Russian-speakers.<sup>114</sup>

Then they spoke of the social attitudes they feel exist within Georgia on the issue. They agreed that society is divided – some say that Georgians should not learn Russian anymore. Of them, some claim that Russian is simply too complicated and from a practical point of view, that people could learn two languages in the time it takes to master Russian. Others say that Georgians should not learn it because they are the aggressors and bombed us, and then there are the people who claim that they should know “the language of the enemy.”<sup>115</sup> Then there is the view that it should be continue to be taught in schools, primarily on a voluntary basis and as a foreign language, that it is important to know a large and powerful neighbor’s language and that the language has a rich and valuable literary tradition. This was the view held personally by all of my respondents. Then they articulated that was a more extreme view that because Georgians know Russian and have a common past want to go back to the times of the Soviet Union or reunite politically with Russia.

My respondents were almost uniformly of the same opinion. Some expressed alarm and regret at the anti-Russia Georgian government messages. Otar stated that “...there are different layers of society that are anti-Russian completely, that believe what the television shows. Then there are people that know that Russia is not Putin, there are people who believe everything they hear and

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with Tatia Shavgulidze, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Levan Shatberashvili, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.

then there are people who think for themselves.”<sup>116</sup> Vika echoed this view, saying that “[t]here is anti-Russian propaganda that is really unhealthy at this point. Not only political; there are there are Georgian writers, from 40-50 years of age, that start saying ‘why do we need this stupid, primitive Russian?’ There’s about 10 percent of them in that generation. But in our generation there are many more. This is scary.”<sup>117</sup> Others emphasized the need to study the attitudes and how the change has happened, and that it is too early to tell about the wider-scale effects of the 2008 conflict and to better judge that 5 to 10 years are needed.

Lika, a 47-year-old respondent expressed regret that the younger generation – ten or so years younger than my younger respondents, have their attitudes towards Russian shaped by these governmental messages:

Some people say that if we don’t like Russia, we shouldn’t like the Russian language either – this is wrong in my opinion. You should know the language. But children don’t like it, like [my 16-year-old son] Niko and his generation doesn’t like Russian. I think so anyway. I think it’s on TV, they always speak so badly of the Russians, and they see how it affects us – our nerves, financially, everything. We don’t say it, but they have their own opinion after all and they don’t like Russian.<sup>118</sup>

Zaharia put it this way: “The younger generation is more angry. The older generation has more personal experience with Russia and can easier dismiss the negative attitude.”<sup>119</sup> Because the younger generation respondents still had enough positive experiences with the Russian language that allowed them to counter the governmental message against it, while it would be of interest to study the opinions of teenagers who have had less of this exposure.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Otari Berdzenishvili, Tbilisi, May 5, 2010.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Vika Giorgobiani, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Lika Tsirekidze, Tbilisi, May 5, 2010.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Zakharia Nadiradze, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.

Among the younger respondents, personal associations with Russian were for the most part connected with memories of childhood television programs, books, and also reading classic Russian literature in the original, and that this was a socially encouraged pastime. The cult classic films like the New Year's film "S Legkim Parom" and others were also significant, as well as the jokes that come from those films. There was a sentiment that they felt that though the Soviet Union has long collapsed, that there continues to be a cultural domain that knowledge of Russian provides access to: "[there is a] cultural space between Russia and Georgia and the whole former Soviet Union, and for me this cultural space still exists."<sup>120</sup> Moreover, previously, there was a social perception that people who spoke good Russian normally came from a more educated and cultured family.

#### **4.2.2 Use of Russian in Georgia**

When asked if the Russian language is useful in Georgia, I received a variety of answers. Most respondents agreed that it was very useful before, but today the situation depends on each person's career and environment. Several younger generation respondents stated that they simply could not have studied in university without knowledge of Russian because at that time the textbooks that were required were in Russian, specifically in the sociology and art departments. They also stated that the translations that existed were bad and it was much more preferable to read them in the original or other international works translated into Russian. However, now the books are beginning to be translated more and better, and there is more access to English books, as well as recent laws requiring Georgian subtitles or dubbing for all films, it is less critical to know Russian.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with Mikheil Svanidze, Tbilisi, May 3, 2010.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Esma Merikishvili, Tbilisi, May 3, 2010; Interview with Tatia Shavgulidze, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.

Most respondents agreed that the need or use for Russian has diminished. Nino B. claimed that “it’s not that useful, but we should know it because we are neighbors, and there will always be a relationship there.”<sup>122</sup> However, besides reasons of personal enrichment and inescapable neighborly relations with Russia, there were several reasons my respondents found knowledge of Russian useful. One was career opportunities; many of them cite knowledge of Russian to be necessary or desired. Another is the ability to read the Russian press – both for the information (one respondent said that the Russian press was simply better than Georgian in general) and in order to be able to get the information in the original and to make decisions uninfluenced by sometimes skewed translations.<sup>123</sup> Papia stated that she needs knowledge of Russian to study spiritual texts in Old Church Slavonic, which is sufficiently similar to modern Russian to be of use. Zaharia uses Russian every day because he lives in an ethnically mixed region, and it is useful for inter-ethnic communication. Vika, as a director and writer, stated that knowledge of Russian is indispensable for her:

It’s essential for me – five or six years ago, I started writing in Russian and I understood that it’s easier for me to write literature in Russian. Of course for work I write in Georgian, and I am Georgian and I am very proud of that. But Russian really complements my self-expression, I need it.<sup>124</sup>

Finally, there is the view that national-level politicians should know Russian, and a general distrust or disapproval of those Georgians who were raised at the same time as the younger generation of my respondents. Knowledge of Russian for them is a kind of litmus test of general education:

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with Nino Berishvili, Tbilisi, May 7, 2010.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Levan Ghambashidze, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Vika Giorgobiani, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.

If you want to be big in politics you have to speak Russian. I don't trust today's politicians who don't speak Russian. They lived in the time of the Soviet Union, they should know this language. If you're 35 today, you have to know Russian. If you don't, that means you didn't go to school correctly, you didn't read, or even watch TV. Then explain to me what you were doing while everyone else was learning Russian. They weren't doing anything – definitely not learning. And I don't need big politicians today who promise something for our country because they will never make a system that is grounded in education.<sup>125</sup>

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With regards toward improvement of their knowledge of the Russian language, there were overwhelmingly favorable attitude for those who have less than native or near-native levels of the language. Two were satisfied with their level of Russian and did not feel that they wanted to invest any more effort in improving it. The rest wanted to improve it, varying from very motivated – that they would pay for a private tutor – to viewing extra practice speaking favorably but not actively seeking it out.

#### ***4.2.3 Teaching Russian in Public Schools***

When asked for opinions about Russian being taught in public schools, all viewed this favorably as well. Most said that it should be taught as any other foreign language, and that students should be given the option about what language they wish to study. Some said it should be taught as only second to English. However, there was some hesitation surrounding the issue of whether or not to make it mandatory because of the fear that no one would study it if they had the option not to, but also not wanting to evoke previous generations' coercive educational policy with regards to Russian. Some views of having it be mandatory but not on an extensive basis were also expressed, because they considered it important enough for the younger generation to continue learning. Others felt comfortable with it continuing to be a mandatory subject in schools. The reasons were again that Russia is Georgia's biggest and most powerful neighbor and that

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with Levan Ghambashidze, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.

“[sadly,] Georgia’s fate will always be tied to Russia” and “that it would not be good to lose the tradition.”<sup>126</sup> Tatia, while promoting the view that it should be optional, felt that the need to study Russian is very clear. She said for her own family that “when I have children I will absolutely teach them Russian, no way that I would not do that.”<sup>127</sup>

Russian was overwhelmingly seen as an asset to know. Though the language and culture were seen as while diminishing in importance on a societal level, there continued to be ample reasons that my respondents found for its use and hoped that it would continue to be taught and maintain some presence in Georgian society. This highly positive attitude indicates that the anti-Russian policies do not fully correspond with the anti-Russian policies. Many respondents spoke of different layers of society holding various attitudes, ranging from extremely negative to quite positive, a more extensive and representative study is no doubt necessary to adequately judge the extent how these views are represented in Georgian society.

### ***4.3 Attitudes towards Minority Languages***

Minority languages have always been part of the social fabric of Georgia. Their coexistence with Georgian is an important testament to the long-lasting tradition. Because the relations and alignments of minority groups in this region is highly volatile, sometimes leading to violence, it is in Georgia’s interest to maintain peace, and positive attitudes towards their languages can help. The tension between favoring more freedoms and official rights and the fear of separatism was apparent in the views held, particularly concerning granting special status to minorities on the basis of territory. Though the replies were mixed, there were positive views of these groups’ languages: below I describe my respondents’ attitudes towards Abkhaz and Mingrelian. I also

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<sup>126</sup> Interview with Levan Shatberashvili, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Tatia Shavgulidze, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.

asked about Svan and Laz, but there were few replies in relation to the Svan language, but because there are so few Laz remaining in Georgia now, this group evoked even less response. Questions about attitudes toward Armenian and Azerbaijani communities did not yield replies that were pertinent to language attitudes. Most had a positive attitude towards both the minority groups if they also learn Georgian; but the last section on minority language status indicates some attitudes also towards these groups as well.

#### **4.3.1 Abkhaz**

In discussing attitudes toward the Abkhaz language, there was a significant difference in knowledge of and experience of Abkhazia, meeting Abkhaz people and knowing something about the language. Almost all the younger respondents had not had any contact with Abkhazia because they were too young to remember the conflict of the 1990s. Most of them had a feeling of alienation towards Abkhazia in general because they had had so little information and exposure to the region, and had a hard time viewing Abkhazia as a Georgian minority. While they were informed about the conflict intellectually, they did not have feelings of attachment to the region. They all viewed a return of Abkhazia to Georgian control very positively, but their rhetoric did not go further. With regards to the actual attitude toward the language, there were very mixed views. Some saw their speaking Abkhaz very positively as a culture that was preserving its linguistic traditions, while others were skeptical of the depth and validity of the group's language, and others shared their knowledge dispassionately. The language is described as weak, dying and by some constructed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Lika and Nino T. both shared views that while they support the use and development of their language, it should be second to Georgian if they are living in Georgia. Eka, who comes from a mixed family (but does not speak Abkhaz) explained that she feels comfortable with it and is



happy that they are speaking their language. She states that “they started learning or improving their own language after the war, because they were criticized that they did not know their language well.”<sup>128</sup> Levan S. claims he does not know much about the Abkhaz language, “only that all the words begin with ‘A’”. But what I think is that the Abkhaz language is lost, it’s dying. This is shown by the fact that the mass media in Abkhazia are not writing or speaking Abkhaz – they speak Russian. Then they have practically no written tradition.”<sup>129</sup> Vika maintains that the Abkhaz were historically part of Georgia and similar to Mingrelians today, had a pan-Georgian identity before the involvement of Russia:

If you look at a map of 13th Century Georgia, it included Abkhazia – it’s a people that have lost sight of their roots. It’s not true that they were different from Georgians. And the language was created in the 1960s, a professor wrote about it. It’s a mixture of its Abzhywa origins with Mingrelian. Without this construction, there wouldn’t be an Abkhaz language.”<sup>130</sup>

Nodar adds to this opinion: “The Abkhaz did not have writing before, it was artificially created.”<sup>131</sup> Zurab expresses an unfavorable attitude: “I have very negative associations toward the Abkhaz language. They don’t have their own language. They live for centuries near the sea, and they don’t have their own word for ‘sea’.”<sup>132</sup> The feelings that the language was constructed for political purposes to divide and conquer Georgia are present and are evident in the negative attitudes. Those who claimed to have less knowledge about the origins of Abkhaz tended to have more favorable views towards the language and its use.

### **4.3.2 Mingrelian**

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Ekaterine Tsereteli, Tbilisi, May 3, 2010.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Levan Shatberashvili, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Vika Giorgobiani, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Nodar Yesiava, Tbilisi, May 7, 2010.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Zurab Adeishvili, Tbilisi, May 10, 2010.

When asked about their associations with other ethnically Georgian but the linguistic minorities Mingrelian, Svan, and Laz, the biggest response was concerning Mingrelians, because they are the most populous, living in the region of Samegrelo (Mingrelia) and previously in Abkhazia as well. Two of my respondents were Mingrelians, though neither said that they spoke Mingrelian when asked what languages they speak; only when I asked about Mingrelians did they mention that they were also from the region.

There were opinions expressing the great cultural value and importance of the minority languages to Georgia and others referring to the negative stereotypes of Mingrelians, including that they are arrogant, rude and tend to speak only Mingrelian even when in the company of Georgians who don't understand. Other respondents had Mingrelian relatives or acquaintances, even those who had unfavorable views of them. Those who had extremely positive opinions about Mingrelian said that it was great they preserved their linguistic tradition despite not having a written tradition and some even expressed a desire to learn the language, as well as preserve it actively by encouraging it to be taught in schools, have original Mingrelian newspapers and television. Nino T. expressed an affinity for Mingrelian songs: "I love Mingrelian songs, they are so sweet and beautiful, they captivate you. I enjoy them very much."<sup>133</sup> Otar spoke of the personal cultural value of the language:

I don't know Svan or Mingrelian, but I think it's great that they have something of their own. It's a treasure for Georgia. It would be good to know them, but I think it's something personal. You know, sometimes mothers write down what their young children say. For them it's important, but for me, for example, it's not. It's something very valuable for Georgia, diversity is beautiful.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Interview with Nino Tsrekidze, Tbilisi, May 10, 2010.

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Otar Berdzenishvili, Tbilisi, May 5, 2010.

Mingrelian sayings recalled by my respondents seemed to indicate a special feeling of pride surrounding their language. Nino T. also recalled that “the Mingrelians have a saying - their native language is Georgian, but their mother tongue is Mingrelian, as if they are two different things.” Nodar, himself a Mingrelian, remembered: “[We] Mingrelians have a joke, that even though [we] have no writing system, that Georgian came from Mingrelian, and that Laz comes from Mingrelian too.” Which language came from what is a disputed matter, one respondent claimed that Laz and Mingrelian are essentially the same language, and that Mingrelian is a dialect of Laz. Others said Mingrelian is a dialect of Georgian.

There were also some very negative attitudes towards Mingrelians, one stereotype that was named was that elite groups of Mingrelians had formed during the war and came to the city to steal. Zurab, though he has Mingrelian relatives and knows the language, speaks of his negative opinion of Mingrelians:

Of all the corners of Georgia, the most shameless people are from Samegrelo (Mingrelia). They are shameless - when they go to Russia they say that they are the best kind of Georgian, royalty. You know in the Second World War, Stalin exempted small nationalities from fighting, like the Abkhaz. And the Mingrelians said they were Abkhaz and not Georgian so that they would not have to fight. And now they are the most dangerous.<sup>135</sup>

Esma states her view on the reason behind the perceived rudeness of Mingrelian Georgians’ desire to speak their language even around those who do not understand it:

Mingrelians will always speak Mingrelian and not pay attention to others. But there is one but. It’s still because of Georgians that they started this ‘language war’ – that why should they speak this other language; they should speak Georgian. As a small group they are eager to fight for their language, like ‘who are you to tell me not to speak in my language? I know this language and I will speak in this language.’ This is the dual characteristic of this – the Georgian hates the Mingrelian for speaking

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Zurab Adeishvili, Tbilisi, May 10, 2010.

Mingrelian and the Mingrelian hates Georgians for imposing their language. Just live in peace.<sup>136</sup>

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Vika perceives the tensions between the linguistic minorities and Georgian language majority as something that drives at the essence of the Georgian nation and its nature.

[Mingrelians'] existence constitutes our Georgian national character – the slightly stupid pride, a bit over-the-top patriotism. On one hand their existence is very interesting, but then on the other hand, because of this you can encounter an unhealthy chauvinism between Georgians, on both sides. One side says 'we were first,' and the other, 'no, we were.'<sup>137</sup>

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My respondents' description of some Georgians' and Mingrelians' mutual dislike seemed to suggest the Mingrelians react to a feeling of imposition of Georgian, and Georgians interpret their behavior as rude or arrogant; though national identity both remains Georgian.

#### **4.3.3 Special status**

When asked what their opinion was on giving linguistic minority status, the respondents were divided. Some were not informed about the debate surrounding multiculturalism and admitted to not having enough information on the issue. The question also could have been more specific, because the general nature of the question made it unclear to some respondents. However, the general feeling from the majority of my respondents who said they were against minority status was that they were against Georgian not being the primary language in those regions. There was a fear of the language status would give the regions motivation for separatism, and also that Russia could take advantage of this potential separatism and use it to take over Georgia. Most respondents said that Georgian should be the first language for this reason and for

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with Esma Merikishvili, Tbilisi, May 3, 2010.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Vika Giorgobiani, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.

communication between the regions. Otherwise the respondents were supportive of the minorities using and developing their languages.

Nodar expressed this view and reflects on this as one of the key divisive political policies that separated Abkhazia from Georgia:

Special status should be given to protect the culture, in schools for example. But official affairs should be in Georgian. If this were the case, then there wouldn't have been a conflict in Abkhazia because they would know and respect us, and wouldn't have wanted a conflict, they would have felt a part of Georgia.<sup>138</sup>

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Some were of the opinion that the minorities who do not know Georgian – referring primarily to the Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities – should learn Georgian because it is better for them in that they have more opportunities if they are integrated, but that they should not be forced to learn. Others were very much for giving all of the regions who wanted it minority status. One respondent was for giving the Mingrelian and Svan regions status but not for Armenian and Azerbaijani, because the latter speak languages that have titular nations.

Others against the idea of minority status cited several other arguments. One was that the government should simply not interfere in these matters – neither forbid nor encourage – the argument of ‘benign neglect.’ Another was that the government policy does not decide very much anyway and is not important; related to the idea that the groups don't need the status because they are active enough in maintaining their language without the support of the state. The last is that by giving minority status, you create an artificial separation in the society that is

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<sup>138</sup> Interview with Nodar Yesiava, Tbilisi, May 7, 2010.

not in place, that can be divisive and damaging to the society in the future: “There is no them, there is only us.”<sup>139</sup>

#### **4.4 Implications**

In sum, there was not a clear divide along generational lines in terms of language attitudes as I had expected. Attitudes towards Georgian and its preservation were important across all of the respondents, and among the older generation there perhaps more positive attitudes and memories of Russian because they had had more contact with Russia in the past, most had visited and/or worked in Russia and had Russian friends or acquaintances. The younger generation had a poorer knowledge of Russian as a whole, but had positive feelings toward improving it and using it for their education and professional development despite negative attitudes toward Russian politics. Opinions were divided about Mingrelian and Abkhaz, as well as whether or not to grant minorities special status.

On a broader theoretical level, the findings indicate the people of a country like Georgia that bases to a large extent its identity on language can also maintain positive attitudes towards multiple other languages even in the context of dissuasive policies and times of political strife. It follows that in a democratic setting, positive attitudes on a social level can then inform policy and subsequently affect the course of the country’s international orientation: is not that only policies inform attitudes but also that attitudes can inform policies. The positive attitudes of many respondents to the Russian language, as well as to English and to minority languages in Georgia indicates that a certain combination of factors have allowed them to maintain their language as a cornerstone of their national identity as well be accepting of other languages and

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<sup>139</sup> Interview with Tatia Shavgulidze, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.

cultures. While it is outside the scope of this study to examine what the conditions contribute to the formation of these attitudes, the example of the 1978 protests showed that the Soviets' move to replace Georgian with Russian as the official language showed that this move pushed Georgians too far and generated a mass resistance. The further study of these conditions would be beneficial in helping promote peace in the region.

## Conclusion

Some maintain that language policy should be built exclusively on a perception of language in its instrumental function, dismissing the view that language can mean more than its communicative ability. The opposing perspective, called by De Schutter and Boyden the constitutive view, maintains that language and identity are inextricably connected – that language is an integral element of one's being and necessary for self-expression, and that this must be reflected in policy.<sup>140</sup> This study has attempted to show that for Georgia, the constitutive view prevails, and this has been reflected in the history of its opposition to Russification from before Soviet rule to independence. In reviewing this history, the multilingual nature of the country and the modern rights debate surrounding it, the picture becomes clear of how language reflects a sense of identity for many Georgians. Consequently, language policies in Georgia have not only resolutely reasserted dominance of the Georgian language in resistance to the repressive post-Stalinist period, giving rise to the Georgian nationalist movement, but have gone further in the time since independence in aiming to eliminate Russian in favor of English. However, polls conducted on language attitudes suggested that negative perceptions of Russian are not unanimous.

The key findings from this study of a small sample of qualitative interviews on attitudes towards Georgian, Russian and minority languages are that however strong the feeling of attachment is to the Georgian language, attitudes towards Russian need not be negative – the two can coexist, and that the difference between the older and younger generation was not stark. This can suggest that

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<sup>140</sup> De Schutter, Helder and Boyden, Michael. "The Ethics of Language Planning," *The Association of Departments of Foreign Languages Bulletin*, Vol. 39, Nos. 2 & 3, Winter-Spring 2008: 11.



striking the right balance between Georgian language dominance and use of Russian can be beneficial in that it allows the preservation of cultural identity while offering an additional means of communication and access to outside opportunity. Moreover, attitudes towards minority languages play an important role in the interplay of Russian and Georgian linguistic dominance – negative attitudes can be divisive and lead to atomization of the region, but the country is not doomed to this: positive attitudes are also possible, which can be conducive to peace and increased cultural integration. Positive attitudes can lead to more peaceful political and cultural relations, and perhaps based on such findings policies can be shaped in such a way as to foster these ideals.

I hope my study can serve as a useful starting point for those who can conduct a more comprehensive and representative study of language attitudes in Georgia. For further research, studying the attitudes of the even younger generation, born 1994 and after, would likely yield more disparate results. The younger generation will have even less knowledge of Russian and with legislature limiting Russian language television and films combined with an anti-Russian political climate, this will likely have a greater effect on language attitudes than for my younger respondents, born 1983-1986, many of whom still have a good command of Russian and have positive childhood memories of Russian television, film and literature. Also interesting in this direction would be to examine the influence of the mass media, both on television and online on language attitudes in this context. Moreover, study of the conditions that provide for positive attitudes would also be highly valuable.

While my research in no way yields representative results for disparities in attitudes toward language in Georgia or in Tbilisi, my findings have gleaned an impression of language attitudes that reveal positive attitudes towards Russian and minority languages is very much possible.

Finding whether or not language policy changes over time match attitudes towards language gives a valuable insight as to whether language in societies with deeply pronounced national identities placing a lot of value on language can be molded or shaped by government action, or whether policies will remain secondary to other factors that truly inform such attitudes. In knowing this, governments and citizens alike would have a better idea about the dynamics of identity formation in respect to language. Ultimately, we should study language attitudes because as they are informed by the past, they can equally inform the future.

## Appendix: Questionnaire

### Basic information

- 1) Name
- 2) Year, date of birth
- 3) Origin in country/region
- 4) Profession
- 5) First/native language, language of education
- 6) Time spent abroad
- 7) Other languages spoken and proficiency

### Attitudes

#### I. Georgian

- a. How important is your language to your identity? If important, why?
- b. Older generation: what are your memories of the 1978 protests against eliminating the Georgian language? Did you participate? Younger: what do you know about the 1978 protests? What do you think about them?
- c. Do you celebrate Georgian Language Day? Why or why not? If yes, what do you do? What significance does the day have for you?
- d. Georgian language myths:
  - i. What do you think about the origins of your language and how it relates to others?
  - ii. What do you think will happen with the Georgian language in the future? (status, use, etc, or linguistic evolution)
  - iii. What special characteristics, if any, do you think the Georgian language has that set it apart from other languages?
  - iv. What do you think of foreigners coming to study the Georgian language? (Why do you think they do it?)

#### II. Russian

- a. Past
  - i. Has your attitude towards Russian changed over time? If so, what made it change (What period, event, association, experience)?
  - ii. How do you see Georgian society change in its relationship with Russian? When did the change occur, what events? Has there been a change in attitude towards using the Russian language since the August 2008 conflict?
- b. Present
  - i. What are your associations with Russian?
  - ii. What do you think most Georgians associate Russian with?
  - iii. Do you find knowledge of Russian useful in Georgia?
  - iv. Do you want to learn or improve your knowledge of Russian?
- c. Future
  - i. Should Russian continue to be taught in public schools?

### **III. Minority languages**

- a. What are your associations or attitudes in relation to the following minority languages in Georgia:
  - i. Abkhaz (de facto under Russian control, Abkhaz official language in Abkhazia)
  - ii. Mingrelian, Laz, Svan (small linguistic minorities that are bilingual in Georgian)
  - iii. Armenian, Azerbaijani (communities not bilingual, members of titular ethnicity and linguistic majority of neighboring countries)
- b. Should they be granted autonomy or special status by the government? Why or why not?

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28. Interview with Levan Ghambashidze, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.
29. Interview with Vika Giorgobiani, Tbilisi, May 4, 2010.
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31. Interview with Zakharia Nadiradze, Tbilisi, May 6, 2010.
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