

**The Languages of the Caucasus:
Scope for Study and Survival**

An Inaugural Lecture (13 Jan 1998)

by

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This lecture is dedicated to the memory of my friend,
Professor Yuri Voronov,
archaeologist, historian and deputy prime-minister of Abkhazia
at the time of his assassination on 11th Sept 1995

Homo sum; humani nil a me alienum puto

'I am a man; nothing appertaining to mankind do I deem foreign to me'

(Terence *Hauton Timorumenos* 'The Self-tormentor', i, I, 25)

Director¹, Chairman, Your Excellencies, Your Lordship, Ladies and Gentlemen!

I am honoured and humbled both by the gracious words to which Professor Rayfield has just treated me personally and all too briefly entertained us all generally and by the mere fact that so many of you have elected to interrupt your busy schedules and in some cases travel quite considerable distances in order to be present this evening. It is a source of particular pleasure to welcome so many members of the various Caucasian communities about whose languages I shall be speaking. My one regret is that neither my parents nor the person who first brought the Caucasus to my attention and roused my enthusiasm for its languages, Professor Sir Harold Bailey, lived long enough to know of the award of this professorship.

I should like to take this opportunity also to thank Catherine Lawrence and Claire Ivison in our Cartography section for drawing the three maps on the handout, Alpey Beler in Computing, technicians Michael Baptista, Patrick Campbell, and Mohini Nair, printers Patrick Quow and Austin Igwe, all of whom helped in various ways with the presentation, but above all Information Officer Mary O'Shea for the diligence and energy she has displayed in organising this whole event.

Whilst everyone embarking on an academic career no doubt dreams of ultimate elevation to a chair, the giving of the accompanying inaugural lecture is strangely somewhat less the stuff of which dreams are made! My main difficulty, as others have experienced before, was to achieve an adequate balance so that the result would hold the interest of (or at least not bore) linguists and non-linguists alike. I naturally hope that what I am about to say will be judged suitable to the occasion and worthy in terms of content, even if not everyone, I am sure, will necessarily agree with every view expressed. But only you can judge.

¹With minor changes, necessary for the present written presentation, this is essentially the same text as was read on the evening of 13th January 1998 in the Brunei Lecture Theatre, SOAS, London.

Introduction

This lecture-theatre first hosted guests on 5th July 1995. The occasion was a day's conference entitled 'Crisis in Chechnia'. I had the honour of delivering the first paper that day, and the quotations with which I then began can equally well serve as launch tonight.

'Ethnically, the Chechens are a Turkic people' -- thus Lord William Rees-Mogg writing in *The Times* on 26 Dec 1994. The Chechens are not a Turkic people, and my corrective letter was later published.

'The Abkhazians [are] a Turkic-speaking Muslim people who made up only 17% of their pre-war autonomous republic's population' -- thus Hugh Pope writing in *The Independent* (Saturday magazine section) of 23 Oct 1993. The Abkhazians are neither Turkic-speaking nor, in Abkhazia at least, holistically categorisable as Muslims.

Far from making amends for his (and his paper's) long-running error, Hugh Pope in a recent book *Turkey Unveiled* (John Murray), co-authored with Nicole Pope, refers (p. 193) to 'an ethnic Muslim rebellion' in the 'lush Black Sea resort[-]region of Abkhazia'².

That representatives of the mass-media (with some distinguished exceptions -- see, for instance, Ascherson 1995) can commit (and re-commit) such basic mistakes underlines at the most banal level the need for the Caucasus to be properly studied and the relevant facts to be widely disseminated, for only then can the rights of local minorities be understood and their cultures safeguarded. Vivid demonstration of what can result on the linguistic level when the rights of a minority are ignored resides in the fact that no-one will ever again have the opportunity to hear live the language being played as you were assembling today in the auditorium, for that recording was of Tevfik Esenç, last speaker of Ubykh, who died aged 88 in the autumn of 1992.

So just who are the indigenous peoples of the Caucasus? Consider first the list of the Caucasian peoples by language-group, of which, as we see, there are three, most conveniently labelled according to geographical distribution: North West Caucasian (with just 3 members: Abkhaz-Abaza, Circassian and Ubykh); North Central Caucasian (or (Vai)Nakh) (incorporating Chechen, Ingush and Bats) partnered by the much more diverse North East Caucasian (or Daghestanian) with its various sub-groups; and South Caucasian (or Kartvelian) Georgian, Mingrelian, Laz and Svan.

²I am grateful to David Hayes of York for drawing this quote to my attention.

The Peoples of the Caucasus (according to language-group, with speaker-numbers)

1. NORTH WEST CAUCASIAN GROUP

*Abkhaz(-*Abaza) (102,938 Abkhazians, 33,801 Abazinians)

Circassian (*West Circassian/Adyghe = 124,941; *East Circassian/Kabardian + Cherkess = 427,007))

Ubykh (extinct since autumn 1992)

2. NORTH CENTRAL/EAST GROUP

2a. NORTH CENTRAL CAUCASIAN (or (VAI)NAKH) GROUP

*Chechen (958,309)

*Ingush (237,577)

Bats (c. 5,000)

2b. NORTH EAST CAUCASIAN (or DAGHESTANIAN) GROUP

Avaro-Ando-Tsezic Group, comprising:

Avaric

*Avar (604,202, including:)

Andic

Andi (c. 9,000)

Botlikh (c. 3,000)

Godoberi (c. 2,500)

Karata (c. 6,000)

Akhvakh (c. 5,000)

Bagvalal (c. 4,000)

Tindi (c. 5,000)

Chamalal (c. 4,000)

Tsezic

Tsez (Dido) (c. 14,000)

Khvarshi (c. 1,500)

Hinukh (c. 500)

Bezhta (c. 7,000)

Hunzib (c. 2,000)

Lako-Dargic Group, comprising:

Lakic

*Lak (118,386)

Dargic

*Dargwa (365,797, including:)

[Kubachi]

[Chirag] and [Megeb]

Lezgian Group, comprising:

*Lezgian (466,833)

*Tabasaran (98,448)

Rutul (20,672)

Tsakhur (20,055)

Aghul (19,936)

Udi (c. 9,000)

Archi (c. 1,000)

Budukh (c. 1,000)

Khinalug (c. 2,000)

Kryts (c. 8,000)

[N.B. the language- vs dialect-status of Kubachi, Chirag and Megeb is disputed]

3. SOUTH CAUCASIAN (or KARTVELIAN) GROUP

*Georgian (c. 3 million, but boosted since 1930 by inclusion of other Kartvelians)

Mingrelian (c. 750,000-1,000,000 according to anecdotal information)

Svan (c. 50,000 anecdotally)

Laz (negligible numbers in Georgia)

The Map 1 depicts the administrative units into which the Caucasus is split (the North Caucasus lying within the Russian Federation, whilst Transcaucasia consists of the three republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, all formerly part of the USSR).

Map 2 (adapted from Klimov 1994) indicates in fine detail the distribution of the relevant speech-communities in and around the Caucasus as of the late Soviet period and strikingly underlines the ethno-linguistic complexity of the area. Names that would not otherwise be obviously those of dialects are bracketed. Note especially the cluster of tiny languages high in the mountains of W. Daghestan, bordering Chechenia and Georgia. Note, too, both the distribution of our languages and also the intermix with non-indigenous languages such as Indo-European (Armenian, Ossetic, Kurdish, Greek, Tat, and Russian) and Turkic (Karachay, Balkar, Azeri, Nogai, Kumyk, and Turkish); apart from the Jews, there is also a community of Semitic Assyrian speakers in Georgia.

Unapproximated figures against a given people on the list are from the last Soviet census (1989), but, some are still inexact insofar as ethnicity tended to be equated with which local literary language was employed (languages with literary status in the Soviet period are indicated on the list by asterisks) -- for example, 'Avars' included not only true Avars but also speakers of all the Andic and Tsezic languages too. Georgians are the largest group, even ignoring the Mingrelians, Svans and Bats -- Bats has for well over a century been spoken solely in the lowland village, Zemo Alvani, in E. Georgia; the combined totals of these four peoples gave just over three and three-quarter million (3,787,393) so-called 'Georgians' in 1989. To avoid unnecessary confusion, I have advocated use of the generic term 'Kartvelians' for reference to the four South Caucasian peoples. Inexactitude of a different order resides in the fact that these totals apply only to the Caucasus itself, whilst many ethnic Caucasians live outside former Soviet territories. The traditional Laz homeland lies in modern Turkey, extending from the Georgian border along to Rize, and large numbers of ethnic Georgians have also ended up on the Turkish side of the frontier -- no-one knows the exact size of these communities. Additionally, the majority of Abkhazians and Circassians, along with many other North Caucasians, live in former Ottoman lands (predominantly Turkey) as a result of the huge migrations that followed Russia's conquest of the North Caucasus in 1864; here lies part of the explanation as to why the Abkhazians and West Circassians represented such a small percentage (17.8% & 22% respectively) of the 1989 populations of their ancestral homelands, and how Ubykh territory (around the now wholly Russianised Sochi) was completely denuded of its autochthonous denizens. It is anecdotally estimated that the North Caucasian population of Turkey is somewhere between 2 and 4 million. Only in the Circassian villages that fell within Israel's eventual boundaries have any of these ex-patriot Caucasians enjoyed the good fortune officially to acquire literacy-skills in their mother-tongues (predominantly Circassian). Jordan too has seen some activity, as did Syria in earlier days. Back in the Caucasus many of the NEC languages are spoken in a mere handful of villages with consequently tiny native-speaker representation. Monolingualism is rare (one might say virtually non-existent) in the Caucasus, whilst multilingualism can be of quite prodigious proportions. One of the early pioneers of Caucasian linguistics, the German Adolf Dirr (1867-1930) states how his informant for Archi (Mohamed Mohamedlin Lo) also had command of Lak, Avar, Aghul (plus Russian, Arabic and Kumyk)! As to religion, Azerbaijan/Daghestan are Muslim (Shi'a/Sunni respectively), as are the most recent converts in Chechenia and Ingushetia. Armenia and Georgia are Orthodox Christian (apart from Muslim Adzharia), whilst both traditions are found amongst the Abkhazians and Circassians in the Caucasus itself, with strong adherence to neither.

Let us now consider something of the history of the study of these languages.

Brief history of the study of Caucasian languages

Interest in the region's languages dates from the 17th century. In the early 1640s the half-Abkhazian half-Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi included in his travel-diary word- and phrase-lists for Georgian and, more crucially, Mingrelian, Abkhaz, Ubykh, and Circassian (see Gippert 1992). At this period Italian missionaries were active along the Black Sea's eastern coast, and the Fide Press in Rome printed in 1629 the first Georgian dictionary (Georgian-Italian), followed in 1643 by the first Georgian grammar, written in Latin by Francisco-Maria Maggio (see Chikobava/Vateishvili 1983). The first native Georgian dictionary and grammar appeared only in the first half of the 18th century. At the start of the 19th century Georgian began to attract such Western philologists as Franz Bopp, whilst pioneering work on the grammar and especially the palæography of Georgian (and Armenian) by the Frenchman Marie Félicité Brosset still retains its value.

It was not until the mid 19th century that the North Caucasian tongues became the object of serious study. Quite unique was the attempt in the 1830s by the Kabardian Shora Nogma to produce not only a writing-system for his native Circassian dialect but also a grammatical description and dictionary, materials which were published only in the 1950s. Our own Philological Society published in 1854 L. Loewe's *Dictionary of the Circassian Language, containing all the most necessary words for the traveller, the soldier and the sailor* -- note the ever-present association of the Caucasus with the military! And it is the Russian soldier-linguist Baron Pëtr Uslar who can justly be styled the 'Father of North Caucasian philology'. Serving in the Caucasus, he was the only linguist to work on Ubykh (and that for a mere week) while Ubykhs still resided there and after the end of the great Caucasian War produced monograph-descriptions of no fewer than seven of the languages (Abkhaz, Chechen, Avar, Lak, Dargwa, Lezgian and Tabasaran). Most work on North Caucasian languages has, though, for obvious reasons, been done by either native or at least Soviet scholars, but one notable exception is Georges Dumézil (1898-1986), without whose tireless investigation of Ubykh (not forgetting Circassian and Abkhaz, plus Laz and Avar) with native speakers in Turkey (especially, of course, Tevfik Esenç) our knowledge of the North West Caucasian family would be immeasurably poorer.

Interest can reasonably be expected to grow once the post-Soviet Caucasus finally manages to resolve the recent and/or ongoing conflicts which continue to cast dark shadows over the area even today.

Why are Caucasian languages of importance?

The special position of Georgian must be acknowledged at the outset. Georgian had the advantage of becoming a literary language when its unique script was devised (probably) circa 400 A.D.; Armenian and the language of the lost Caucasian Albanians were also then provided with scripts. Since at least three Westerners, including me, have been spurred to learn Georgian purely by the beauty of that form of the script that

developed some 900 years ago, I give an example of it (Example 1) below. It is written from left to right and does not distinguish between upper and lower case-forms.

Example 1. Georgia's unique script:

სიყვარული . . . არ შეჰხარის უსამართლობას, არამედ ჭეშმარიტებით ხარობს . . .
ჯერჯერობით კი ეს სამია: სარწმუნოება, სასოება და სიყვარული; ხოლო ამათში
უმეტესი სიყვარულია.

siq'varuli...ar shehxaris usamartlobas, aramed ch'eshmarit'ebit xarobs...
dzherdzherobit k'i es samia: sarts'munoeba, sasoeba da siq'varuli; xolo amatshi
umet'esi siq'varulia.

'Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth...

And now there are these three: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love'
(1 Corinthians 13.6-13)

A millennium and a half of writing mean that there is a wealth of literature of all genres still largely unknown to non-Georgian audiences. But as two past inaugurals (by the late David Marshall Lang of SOAS in 1965 and by this evening's chairman, Professor Donald Rayfield, more recently in 1991) have been devoted to this topic (see also Rayfield 1994), I shall add nothing tonight, except to stress that (a) anyone concerned with the transmission of the Bible and related texts cannot ignore the biblical material preserved in Old Georgian, and (b) with such a documented history, Georgian is one of the few non-Indo-European languages to provide hard evidence for the historical linguist of how a language can change.

For anyone fascinated by the phenomena of natural languages the narrow isthmus on the south-eastern fringe of our European continent that separates the Black and Caspian Seas is the home to some of the world's most exotic forms of human speech. As just noted for Georgian, these indigenous languages are not Indo-European -- indeed no-one knows whence they came, which explains the term 'indigenous'. All experts agree that the Kartvelian family is totally unrelated to its northern neighbours (indeed, no genetic links have been conclusively demonstrated for this family with any other language), and the common opinion has been that, whilst there may be a remote genetic link between N.W. Caucasian and Nakh-Daghestanian, this has thus far eluded proof. However, S. Nikolaev and S. Starostin's monumental 1,406-page *North Caucasian Etymological Dictionary* of 1994 (Asterisk Publishers, Moscow) with numerous suggested reconstructions for just such a parent-language is currently causing much debate as to whether the link has finally been established. The problem, of course, is to decide the degree of abstractness permissible in reconstructions where the gap between putative parent and attested reflexes can be as wide as illustrated by:

Example 2. Suggested Proto-North Caucasian reconstruction and some of its reflexes: *fɾekɸ'wě 'bone' => Chechen dəfəɣk, Ingush t'eɣk, Avar rakɸ'ɾa; Proto-West Caucasian *ɣ^Wa => Abkhaz (a-)va('ts'əs) 'rib', Abaza dza(-'ts'əs) 'rib', Adyghe tsə(-'ɣe) 'rib', Kabardian dza(-'zə) 'rib', Ubykh -dza- 'beside' (as verbal preverb).

Even within NWC, the proto-NWC construct here incorporates a basic voiced lateral fricative which is first palatalised and then labialised, a sound nowhere attested in the Caucasus today, just to account for the unbracketed material in the modern NWC cognates

Whatever the professional investigator's speciality (phonetics-phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax), there are rich pickings indeed to be had in the Caucasus, as I shall now quickly delineate.

The small N.W. Caucasian family is well-known to linguists primarily because of the phonological feature whereby its members are characterised by extremely large consonantal inventories. Literary Kabardian has the smallest total with 45 distinctive units (or phonemes), roughly twice the number in English, whilst Ubykh boasted at least 80, utilising all points of articulation in the vocal tract from lips to larynx with secondary features of palatalisation, labialisation, and (for Ubykh) pharyngalisation³.

³A charming story once told by the Ubykhs but related to me by a Circassian in 1974 gives a hint of the phonetic challenges of these tongues. There was once a sultan who collected languages and, hearing of a fabulous example located in the N. W. Caucasus, he despatched a minion to go and learn Ubykh/Circassian. After some time the minion returned. Asked by the sultan to teach him what he had learned, he untied his sack and tipped onto the floor the pebbles he had collected in the Caucasian mountains, saying: "Listen to these sounds. Foreigners can gain no greater understanding of Ubykh/Circassian speech."

Example 3:

Chart of Ubykh Consonants

Bilabial	p	b	p'	f		m		w
Pharyngalised	p ^ɣ	b ^ɣ	p' ^ɣ		v ^ɣ	m ^ɣ		w ^ɣ
Dental	t	d	t'		r	n		
Labialised	t ^w	d ^w	t' ^w					
Affricate	ts	dz	ts'	s	z			
Alveolo-Palatal	tʃ	dʒ	tʃ'	ʃ	ʒ			
Labialised	tʃ ^w	dʒ ^w	tʃ' ^w	ʃ ^w	ʒ ^w			
Palato-Alveolar	tʃ	dʒ	tʃ'	ʃ	ʒ	l	ɬ	ɬ'
Labialised				ʃ ^w	ʒ ^w	(vid. Hewitt 1986)		
Retroflex	tɕ	dʒ	tɕ'	ɕ	ʒ			
Velar	[k	g	k']	x	ɣ			
Palatalised	k ^y	g ^y	k ^y '					
Labialised	k ^w	g ^w	k ^w '					
Uvular	q		q'	χ	ʙ			
Palatalised	q ^y		q ^y '	χ ^y	ʙ ^y			
Labialised	q ^w		q ^w '	χ ^w	ʙ ^w			
Pharyngalised	q ^ɣ		q ^ɣ '	χ ^ɣ	ʙ ^ɣ			
Pharyngo-Labialised	q ^{wɣ}		q ^{wɣ} '	χ ^{wɣ}	ʙ ^{wɣ}			
Laryngal				h				

Total = 83 (counting the 3 in square brackets used in loans only)

Languages with many consonants can happily operate with few distinctive vowels. An often bitter debate raged over just how reductionist one could be in depriving Kabardian's vowel-sounds (phones) of phonemic status after Aert Kuipers' so-called 'no-vowel' hypothesis for Kabardian appeared in 1960. Today it is generally accepted that each member of the family has at least the basic bipolar opposition between an open and a close vowel (viz. /a/ vs /ə/).

Large numbers of consonant-phonemes are also attested in some of the Daghestanian languages. The Avaro-Andian languages are especially rich in laterals, Akhvakh (see Magomedbekova 1967) having seven -- English-type, Welsh-type, intensive (= fortis, tense), affricate, intensive, and the last two glottalised:

Example 4. Akhvakh laterals:

l ɬ ɬː kɬ kɬː kɬ' kɬ'ː

The sheer intensity of this last sound perhaps renders it most appropriate (though some may demur) for inclusion in Avar's declaration addressed to a woman (see Chikobava & Tsertsvadze 1962):

Example 5. Avar for 'I love you(FEMALE)':

diye mun y-o kʰʷʷila

I.DAT you.NOM FEMALE-love

Anyone in need of the equivalent for a male acquaintance should use *v-o kʰʷʷila* as the verb-form.

Kartvelian presents no great obstacles, apart from a tendency to pile up consonants, particularly in Georgian, where there are 768 possible ways of beginning a word consonantly. Of the complexes 233 are 2-term, 334 3-term, 148 4-term, 21 5-term, and 4 6-term.

Example 6. Some Georgian consonant-complexes:

nak'vertʃlebi bdyvrialebda -- ts'its'ilebs brtʃq'alebit da prtʃxilebit p't'k'vniɖnen

'Sparks were flashing -- they were plucking the chicks with (their) talons and nails'

The complexity of vowel-systems in Nakh and the Svan dialects is of some interest, as is stress-placement in Abkhaz, and tonal accent-systems have now been postulated in representatives of Daghestanian.

In terms of morphology, N.W. and N.E. Caucasian stand at opposite poles, with Kartvelian again occupying a sort of middle ground. Students coming from an Indo-European background usually find Kartvelian verbs quite daunting with their capacity to agree with subject, direct and indirect object, whilst about half a dozen cases (or changes to the shape of nouns) are available to shew grammatical function. N.W. Caucasian verbs, however, are polysynthetic, coupled with a minimal case-system, Abkhaz not altering the shape of the noun for any of the verb's major arguments. Then N.E. Caucasian has limited verb-agreement, though the compensation (or penalty, if you prefer) is a handsomely rich case-system. The Lezgian verb agrees with nothing. Compare the following equivalents for 'The girl gave the flower to the boy' in representative languages from each of the three families:

Example 7. Lezgian, Abkhaz and Mingrelian parallel sentences:

ruf.a

gada.di-z

tsiik

ga-na

girl(ERGATIVE) boy-DATIVE flower(NOMINATIVE) give-PAST

a-^lp^hWəzba 'a-t^f'k^W'ən a-^fWt (Ø-)'yə-l-ta-(Ø-)t'
 the-girl the-boy the-flower (it-)him-she-give-(PAST-)FINITE
tsira-k bof+i-s q'vavil-i ki-me-(Ø-Ø-)tf-u
 girl-ERG boy-DAT flower-NOM PREVERB-PREV-(it-him-)give-she.PAST

Lezgian (see Haspelmath 1993 for details) has a bare verb with case-marking on the nouns; Abkhaz has no case-marking and everything in the verb; Mingrelian combines the two patterns.

Of course, one cannot immediately appreciate the polysynthetic potentiality of the N.W. Caucasian verb from this Abkhaz example, but, taking the same root *-ta-* 'give', consider what can be done with it:

Example 8. Typically polysynthetic Abkhaz verb-form:

yə-š-pa-lə-zə-y-m-ta-g^Wəfa-(za/ə-)y
 it/them-how-QUESTION-she-POTENTIAL-to.him-not-give-poor.thing-what.is.it?
 'How could she, poor thing, not give it/them to him?'

where the entire English sentence is encapsulated in this single verb-form

Apart from the strictly grammatical cases (marking subject, direct and indirect object), N.E. Caucasian typically has a large number of locatives, achieved by taking a basic position, such as 'on', and using different variants for 'being on', 'moving onto', and 'moving from on', as in Avar:

Example 9. Avar Locative case-forms:

gant^fi-da vs *gant^fi-de* vs *gant^fi-da-s:a*
 'on the stone' vs 'onto the stone' vs 'from on the stone'

Counting-systems are sometimes based, as in English, on units of ten, but more usually they are vigesimal, based, like French *quatre-vingts dix* '90' (= 4-20s + 10), on units of 20 (upto '99', that is). However, Bats takes the vigesimal pattern to extremes (see Desheriev 1953 for details). Consider the following:

Example 10. Bats counting-system:

tiq'a-pxi-ts' -tiq'a-uz-tiq'a yetx-e-ts'a tiq'a ts ʔi
 20-5-times-20-times-20 6-10-times 20 1

You may need calculators to assure yourself that this does actually amount to 10,321!

Cases where vocabulary-items result from combining more basic units of meaning (semantic primes) are probably familiar from a number of languages. N.W. Caucasian abounds in such cases:

Example 11. Lexical analysis in N.W. Caucasian:

Circassian *ne-ps* ≠ 'tear' <= *ne* 'eye' + *ps* ≠ 'water';

Ubykh *za-ya* 'war' <= *za-* 'one another' + *ya-* 'hit'

Abkhaz has *a-x-ta/ r-pa* as the name of a type of headgear that is secured with two long side-pieces wound around the head; the word seems analysable as 'the-head-in/from.in-CAUSE-jump' = 'that which is made to jump with the head inside/around the head'. It may by now be obvious how N.W. Caucasian meaningful units (sememes) regularly consist of just a consonant (possibly + vowel). But intriguing semantics are not limited to the structure of individual words. Let me pose a little brain-teaser for you to mull over perhaps during the non-linguistic half of this talk. One tale in the Abkhaz epic saga known as *The Narts* ends thus:

Example 12. Abkhaz phraseological puzzle:

X^wa'z^warp ≠, *y* ≠ 'x ≠ *l+pa a-'ts'* ≠ *s (∅-∅-)ta-'x^wmar-wa*, *a-'y^wn* ≠ *q'a d* ≠ *t^sa-(∅-)yt'*

X^wazh^warp ≠ *s*, his.hat the.bird playing.in.it, to.the.house he.went

'*X^wazh^warp* ≠ *s* went home [literally] with a bird playing in his hat'

What does this colloquialism mean?

Widespread, but not quite universal, in the Caucasus is the syntactic feature of ergativity, whereby the subject of transitive verbs is treated differently from the subject of intransitive verbs, which is then marked the same way as the transitive verb's direct object. The Andi range of constructions depending on verb-type given below illustrates this, and more (see Tsertsvadze 1965 for details):

Example 13. Andi syntactic patterning:

ima girdi

father.NOM lay.down

'Father lay down' (with Intransitive verb)

vs

im-u-di k'otu b-ixi

father-ERG horse.NOM it-bought

'Father bought a horse' (with Transitive verb)

vs

im-u-y-o hiludo ila

father-AFFECTIVE loves mother.NOM

'Father loves mother' (with verb of emotion or perception)

vs

im-u-b k'otu b-ik'udo

father-GENITIVE horse.NOM it-is

'Father has a horse' (for the possessive construction)

(cf. the Latin variant *patri equus est* father.DATIVE horse.NOM it.is)

N.B. the *-y-* and *-b* elements in the Affective and Genitive cases are class-markers, classes 2 and 3 respectively, agreeing with the Nominative nominal within the clause -- another remarkable feature!

Avar goes one stage further -- with no Affective case, it distinguishes between verbs of emotion with Dative subject and verbs of perception with Locative subject:

Example 14. Avar equivalences to Andi's Affective construction:

ins:u-ye v+as v-ok ʔ:ula

father-DAT son.NOM him-loves

'Father loves his son' (with verb of emotion)

vs

ins:u-da v+as v-ix'ula

father-LOC son.NOM him-sees

'Father sees his son' (with verb of perception)

Whilst subordinate clauses in Kartvelian are, with the exception of Turkish-influenced Laz, generally handled after the pattern of Indo-European languages (viz. conjunction plus finite verb), North Caucasian languages typically employ special non-finite verb-forms (sc. forms which cannot of themselves produce well-formed clauses/sentences). Whereas English has both 'he went' and 'I saw where he went' with no change to the 'went', Abkhaz used its finite equivalent in Example 12 (*d ʔ'tsa-(Ø-)yt'*) but needs a different form for the subordinate expression, namely:

Example 15. Abkhaz subordinate phrase:

d-ax'-'tsa-(Ø-)z

(Ø-)z-ba-(Ø-)yt'

(s)he-where-go-(PAST)-NON.FIN (it-)I-see-(PAST)-FIN

'I saw where (s)he went'

which is perhaps something akin to 'I saw the whereness/whereabouts (s)he went', with intra-verbal particle *-ax'* 'where'.

But -- and here I ask non-linguists' indulgence! -- we have evidence in Example 16 below for how a new part of speech, namely a subordinating conjunction, has been (or better perhaps, is being) developed from the original speech-particle *ʔw a*. This latter is the root of the verb *a-ʔw a-'ra* 'say(ing)' and serves as a sort of verbal equivalent to our written quotation-marks. Example 16^a gives the basic pattern with repetition of the original words spoken/thought, so that the literal meaning for 'She had an oath that she would not marry anyone other than the one who wrestled her to the ground' is: 'She had as oath: "I shall not marry anyone apart from the one who wrestles me to the ground", saying'. Example 16^b is the nearest inherently North West Caucasian equivalent to the natural English rendition but with a final non-finite verb this time with intra-verbal particle *-ʃə-* 'how' (rather than *-ax'-* in Example 15) to give something like: 'She had as oath the howness she would not marry anyone other than the one who wrestles her to the ground'. But 16^b' shews the typically English construction with a final finite verb 'she would not marry' accompanied by the speech-particle now necessarily re-interpreted as subordinating conjunction 'that'. The somewhat illogical coupling of intra-verbal particle *-ʃə-* and speech-particle *ʔw a* in 16^a with no change of original persons or tense (so *sə-* is retained with the Present tense) and in 16^c with change of persons and tense (so *də-* combines with the Imperfect tense) give the clue as to how the English-type construction could have developed: *ʔw a*, conjoined with *-ʃə-*, came to be felt as synonymous with it, and thus acquired the capacity to stand alone even when persons and tense changed (a combination quite feasible, as we have seen, for the intra-verbal particle itself) but crucially retained its capacity to govern a finite verb, even though this now fully subordinate structure is quite distinct from anything ever said/thought.

Example 16. Developing subordinate clauses in Abkhaz:

- a. *tʃ'a+ta+x'a-s yə-lə-ma-n yə-s-'a-k^w-pa-n(ə)*
 oath-PREDICATIVE it-she-have-PAST who-me-to-on-jump-ABSOLUTE
s-k'a-'zə-ʒ-wa yə-da sə-y-tʃə-tʃə-'wa-m
 me-down-who-throw-PRES.NON.FIN him-without I-him-with-go-PRES-not
ʔw a
 SPEECH.PARTICLE

'She had an oath that she would not marry anyone other than the one who jumped on her [wrestling] and threw her down' (lit. '...I shall not marry..., saying')

vs

- b. *tʃ'a+ta+x'a-s yə-lə-ma-n yə-l-'a-k^w-pa-n(ə)*
 who-her-to-on-jump-ABSOLUTE

d-k'a-'zə-ʒ-wa *'yə-da*
 her-down-who-throw-PRES.NON.FIN
də-ʃə-y-tsa-m-tsa-wa+z
 she-how/that-him-with-not-go-NON.FIN.IMPERFECT

vs

b'. ... *də-y-tsa-tsa-'wa-mə-z+t' hwa*

vs

a'. ... *sə-ʃə-y-tsa-m-tsa-wa hwa*

vs

c. ... *yə-l-'a-kw-pa-n(ə) d-k'a-'zə-ʒ-wa 'yə-da*
də-ʃə-y-tsa-m-tsa-wa+z hwa

Since syntax has been largely ignored by native linguists, there is a huge amount of work to be done in this sphere alone.

The lure of the Caucasus for the linguist is, I trust, by now apparent. Similar claims could be made in abundance for the attention of students of: folklore, folk-music, dance, dress (see relevant chapters in Lindisfarne-Tapper & Ingham 1997), oral literature, home-industries, regional foods -- in short, whatever is subsumed under the disciplines of ethnology, and anthropology. But decent research demands flourishing and accessible societies. Is that what we find?

Threats to the viability of Caucasian languages

In a very real sense, all the ethnic groups in the Caucasus are minorities, but some are manifestly more minor than others. There is only one language we are discussing whose long-term future is assured, and that is Georgian. Well over three million native speakers, a thriving literature, use across the media, and, as a full republican language, serving as the medium of tuition (not only for ethnic Georgians and Svans but for any other family in Georgia that has so desired it) from kindergarten through to at least first degree level guaranteed and guarantee it a healthy future. The same cannot be said of the others.

The earlier discussion made clear that the majority of the smaller languages have never been written -- even those that gained orthographies in the late 19th century and/or were granted literary status by the early Soviets often enjoy mere token usage in publication, broadcasting and education because of the all-pervasiveness of Russian (see Wixman 1980) as the natural *lingua franca* in this most cosmopolitan of areas. As a result of entirely natural evolution many are spoken by precariously few speakers who, as stated, may be multilingual in more (often much more) viable tongues (used perhaps widely in the media, especially broadcasting, a crucially important factor at the end of the 20th century). But in some instances it was not natural evolution that caused

reduction in numbers (and threatens still further reduction). Map 3 illustrates how up to 1864 N.W. Caucasians occupied the eponymous territory from the R. Ingur up the Black Sea coast and along the Kuban basin to the upper reaches of the Zelenchuk rivers (abutting the Turkic-speaking Karachay-Balkars in the mountains and to the east the Ossetes, whose language is related to Persian, the Chechens and Ingush).

Compare that uninterrupted occupation with the fragmentary nature of their representation today, as shown earlier on Map 2. For decades in the 19th century the N.W. Caucasians, on the one hand, and the Chechens and northern Dagestanis, on the other, pursued separate resistance to Russia's drive southward (see Baddeley 1908 [1998], Blanch 1960, Bennigsen Broxup 1992, Gammer 1994) -- the Tsars gained their first toehold in Transcaucasia when the combined central and eastern Georgian kingdoms sought Russian protection from Persia and were promptly annexed (1800-1). Despite some strong expressions of sympathy and support for the mountaineers' noble struggle from certain citizens of these islands, the man in a position to marshal effective action on behalf of the British Empire deemed the Caucasus of less importance than taking a stand against Russian expansion in the Balkans, thus setting a miserable precedent for his post-Soviet successors. Permit me to seize this opportunity to offer an apology to the descendants of especially those Caucasians subsequently lost in exile to their homeland that it was a former graduate of my own *alma mater* (St. John's College, Cambridge) who fatefully decided to sacrifice them -- Lord Palmerston.

Faced with the choice of being resettled away from the Caucasus' protecting slopes onto Russian controlled lowlands and freedom to practise their religion in Ottoman realms, those more devoted to Islam preferred the latter option. Thus did the majority Circassian and Abkhazian populations along with the whole Ubykh nation bid farewell to their ancestral mountains. It is estimated that half of those who took to poorly equipped boats for a new life in unfamiliar climes perished of hunger or disease⁴. In recognition of their proven fighting abilities, many were settled along the Ottoman frontiers, which explains why we still find N.W. Caucasian (principally Circassian) communities from Kosovo through Turkey, where most reside, into Jordan, Syria, Iraq and, ironically in view of later Middle Eastern animosities, Israel. Thanks to continuing migrations up to the 1920s, numerous villages peopled by speakers of many North Caucasian languages are to be found in Turkey. Chechens also live in Jordan. But, as noted above, with virtually no chance to learn to read and write in their mother-tongues and living in pockets of communities, Caucasians have not surprisingly had difficulties preserving their inherited modes of speech, a process now accelerated as younger people move away from the villages for financial betterment and by the spread to rural parts of television. The linguistic and cultural assimilation of the ethnic Ubykhs to their Circassian or Turkish neighbours provides the starkest example of how easily a language can decline and even disappear in conditions of neglect⁵.

⁴Harrowing eye-witness accounts of the chaos of departure are available in 'Papers respecting the Settlement of Circassian Emigrants in Turkey' (Presented to the House of Commons, 1864).

⁵For a moving description of Ubykh's fate since its removal from the Caucasus see Dumézil's 'Notes pour un centenaire' (in Dumézil 1965).

In a sense Russia's relentless assault on the N. Caucasus and eventual capture of it in 1864 set the seeds for the late- and post-Soviet conflagrations. Non-native peoples began to move into vacated lands, engendering a dangerous conviction among later generations that *they* had perhaps unique title to the territories. Constant unrest among the unyielding Chechens was to result during World War II in their wholesale deportation to Central Asia (other pawns in the game of demographic manipulation being played out by 'The Father of All Peoples' were the Ingush, Karachays, Balkars, plus from Georgia the Muslim Meskh(et)ians and Armenian Hemshinli -- to name only deportees from the Caucasus at this time; Greeks and Laz were expelled after the war) (Nekrich 1978). Most, but not all, such forced exiles were allowed to return home only in 1957, by which time others had again moved into empty properties, laying a fuse for the current Ingush-North Ossetian conflict, a lower-key dispute between some Chechens and Daghestanis, and repeated failed attempts by the Meskhians to return to Georgia.

This is neither the time nor place to examine the history, causes and general details of the Georgian-Abkhazian or Russo-Chechen wars of 1992-93 and 1994-96 respectively. See the ample references⁶. However, some observations are surely germane to our present theme.

In 1913 a certain Georgian by the name of Ioseb Besarionis-dze Dzhughashvili wrote the following in an essay 'Marxism and the National Question': 'But in the Caucasus there are a number of peoples each possessing a primitive culture, a specific language, but without its own literature; peoples, moreover, which are in a state of transition, partly becoming assimilated and partly continuing to develop. [...] What is to be done with the Mingrelians, the Abkhazians, the Adjarians, the Svanetians, the Lesghians, and so on, who speak different languages but do not possess a literature of their own? [...] The national question in the Caucasus can be solved *only by drawing the backward nations and peoples into the common stream of a higher culture*' (pp. 48-49 of an undated English translation in the volume 'Marxism and the National and Colonial Question', published by Martin Lawrence Ltd., London). These lines betray what I fancy to be a widespread but regrettable view in the Caucasus (and, no doubt, beyond) that the mere accident of history that has blessed some language-groups with a script, thus granting them the opportunity to create a written literature, is the sole diagnostic of higher cultural status. Anyone committed to this attitude could all too readily slip into viewing non-literate (or newly literate) societies with disdain. And this, I would argue, is precisely what has happened.

⁶Anyone interested in the former should consult any or all of the following: Hewitt 1993; 1998; Forthcoming a; or Hewitt & Khiba 1998, which incorporates relevant articles among reading material for, and a grammatical sketch of, the Abkhaz language; for the latter there is the excellent recent book from Gall & De Waal (1997).

When the Soviets came to power, one of their immediate problems was the eradication of the illiteracy inherited from Tsarist apathy. It was decided (not unreasonably) that the best way to achieve this goal was to provide education in local mother-tongues, rather than insist on inculcating literary skills via Russian, which was for many a totally foreign language. As a result, a number of previously unwritten (or little written) languages were officially awarded literary status and styled 'Young Written Languages'. Henceforth, Georgian was no longer the only written native Caucasian tongue -- indeed, more Caucasian languages were written in the 1920s-30s than the asterisks on your list imply. The largest Caucasian speech-community to see their fledgling literary status snuffed out in the mid-1930s were the Mingrelians. Can it be entirely accidental, given the earlier quote, that it was precisely from the time when Ioseb Dzhughashvili (known to the world as Stalin) had finally established himself as the Kremlin's dominant player (viz. circa 1930) that the Mingrelians (along with the Svans and Soviet Laz) became categorised as 'Georgians'? Note that the Laz community in Turkey make no such category-error. Whatever script had initially been selected for any given Young Written Language, Roman-based orthographies were introduced for them in the late 1920s (though this did not affect written Mingrelian!), and then between 1936 and 1938 all such scripts were replaced by Cyrillic-based variants, with the notable exception of Abkhaz (and the Ossetic of Georgia's province of South Ossetia), which both had Georgian-based orthographies imposed. Again, is it too far-fetched to interpret these moves as attempts ultimately to draw so-called 'backward nations' into the 'common stream' of the 'higher cultures' (sc. of Russian or Georgian)? Though they avoided (just) post-war deportation to the east, the Abkhazians suffered the closure of their Abkhaz-language schools and the loss of the right to teach Abkhaz as Georgian *Ersatz*-establishments were opened during 1945-6 and the Georgian language was forced on them. Little wonder, then, that with the example of their 19th century forebears and the fate of Ubykh constantly in their collective conscience, the Abkhazians were determined to take control of their own affairs as the USSR started to disintegrate rather than bow to continuing pressure to assimilate as their homeland became ever more swamped mainly by Mingrelians. Russian and Mingrelian were the two languages most commonly heard there. Likewise the Chechens made the grievous mistake of taking Yeltsin at his word and sought to grab the ultimate in independence, namely total removal of Moscow's unwelcome control over their destiny.

Neither an Abkhazian language nor an Abkhazian culture has ever existed. The damned Bolsheviks led naive Circassians astray by inventing an Abkhazian autonomy for them on Georgian territory, and writing a non-existent nationality, Abkhazian, in their passports' -- thus, the writer-academic Revaz Mishveladze ('Open Letter to Fazil

Iskander⁷, *Akhalgazrda Iverieli* [Young Iberian], 11 Dec 1990 in Georgian). In a climate coloured by such publications from supposed intellectuals (and, sadly, this is by no means exceptional) can there be any hope of a meaningful resolution to the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict? Whether Russian propaganda's long-standing depiction of the Chechens as a nation of brigands and criminals reflects the same sort of cultural superiority linked to a marked racist streak towards Russia's non-Russian peoples often encountered in Russian society or is just designed to underscore the sort of baseless imperial bluster seen in the 1996 Coppieters' book from academic Dmitri Danilov, namely: 'The Northern Caucasus is actually an inalienable part of Russian territory' (p.137), it is hard to say, but it reinforces just how difficult it will be to reach a final agreement that meets Chechen demands; meanwhile, Chechnya's infrastructure lies in ruins and the rule of law has collapsed. Though multi-ethnic Daghestan has avoided the worst excesses of inter-communal conflict, one hears of resentment of the privileges enjoyed by such larger groups as the Avars and of inter-group rivalries between some of these larger entities themselves. Periodic assassinations and bombings hardly bode well either. But Bats perhaps faces the most immediate danger: it is reported that parents, fully bilingual in Georgian, are no longer bothering to teach Bats to their children.

Future prospects for study and survival

I should perhaps stress at this juncture that the political arrangements agreed in settlement of current or future disputes in the Caucasus are of no real interest to me in and of themselves. However many states eventually achieve international recognition here, what does concern me and has always been the motivating factor behind my writings or public statements on recent developments there -- as it will assuredly remain -- is simply the need to safeguard the precious linguistic (indeed cultural) legacy that has been bequeathed to us in these mountains. How can this best be done? One can think of responses pertaining to both local and international levels.

A. Local-level Response(s)

I suspect that many an average Englishman and Georgian harbour a shared sub-conscious conviction that the world would be a better place if everyone in it spoke just English or Georgian respectively. Such views cannot be condoned. Let us take as illustration, if I dare mention them, the highly sensitive cases of Mingrelian and Svan.

Whether or not these two peoples are happy to be styled 'Georgians' as dictated by post-1930 orthodoxy is irrelevant. No serious observer denies that Mingrelian and Svan are distinct languages, mutually unintelligible with Georgian (and with each other). If nothing is done to foster these unwritten speech-varieties, if Mingrelian and Svan children become progressively less proficient in their mother-tongues as the

⁷Iskander is a native Abkhazian who chooses to write in Russian. He is widely regarded as one of the finest living 'Russian' authors.

importance of only Georgian for their self-awareness as so-called 'Georgians' is drilled into them in a self-assertive independent Georgia, the languages will surely diminish and vanish (already many ethnic Mingrelians are ignorant of Mingrelian). Sadly, anyone simply raising this issue lays himself open to the knee-jerk charge of encouraging separatism, because simplistic reasoning assumes that cultivating separate language-awareness inexorably leads to demands for political secession. Whilst this *may*, of course, be a consequence, there is no logical reason why it *should* be, and, if the matter is dealt with wisely and sensitively, it *need* not be -- the theoretical possibility of political unrest is, in my opinion, no defence of the *status quo* when current complacency is likely to have but one outcome -- language-reduction. Rather than going their separate ways, depriving themselves of enrichment through Georgia's literary culture, these two peoples could be expected to shew even greater loyalty to a central authority generously bestowing on them the benefits of learning to read and write their mother-tongues in the slightly adapted Georgian script that has long coped with the extra sounds of Mingrelian and Svan in occasional scholarly works incorporating such materials. But much more importantly (for Georgians, -- I repeat, for Georgians --at least) than this -- if the non-Kartvelian peoples living within Georgia's presently recognised frontiers, who well know the unconcern (to put it no more strongly) that characterises ethnic Georgians' attitudes towards even related Kartvelian languages, were instead to have before them the example of a central authority evincing a paternalistic concern for the language-rights of fellow Kartvelians, might this not engender what has long been so desperately lacking among the 30% non-Kartvelian portion of the population, namely confidence in those authorities that the (linguistic and other) rights of *non-Kartvelians* would at last be properly recognised and respected? Is not this an essential pre-requisite for the preservation of the territorial integrity Georgians so earnestly crave? For surely a state's legitimacy derives not from abstract international recognition but only from its capacity to command true loyalty from the whole citizenry it claims as its own?

An unexpected example of altruism, albeit motivated by self-interest, in one part of the Caucasus could then initiate a virtuous domino-effect throughout the region. However, lest such a romantic outlook leave some of you suddenly stunned by visions of pigs in flight, let us move swiftly on to:

B. International-level Responses

In the final analysis it is the peoples themselves who must work out mutual *modi vivendi*, but where dominant groups seek closer integration into European or Western structures while failing properly to respect linguistic and/or ethnic minorities, should not Europe or the West exert pressure to encourage appropriate behaviour towards the relevant minority? What should be a rhetorical question is palpably not seen as such by those best placed to pressure or encourage. 'The self-determination of oppressed

nations was a cornerstone of our anti-Communism. For half a century we preached that on the day democracy replaced tyranny the victim would be raised above the bully and small nations would be free. Fat chance,' was John Le Carré's succinct summation in *The Observer* (Dec 1994⁸) of the West's betrayal of the high hopes some Caucasians had that Western politicians would act in accordance with the standards of civilised behaviour they boasted of championing. But more deadly in its effect than the journalistic talent for getting things wrong in the Caucasus, sketched at the start, was the abysmal catalogue of errors committed by leading Western politicians as the USSR threatened to, and then did, collapse.

It is difficult to see what the West could have done to prevent bloodshed in Nagorno-Karabagh (the Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan), which began its own descent into mayhem as early as 1988, but the same cannot be said of the later Abkhazian and Chechen wars, both of which could have been avoided, had sensible measures been adopted both locally and, perhaps more importantly, abroad. Is there a lesson in these appalling tragedies? If the collective intelligence of our foreign ministries is not fully apprised of the issues, especially for remote countries and their peoples, how on earth can correct policies be formulated? In the words of SOAS' motto, 'Knowledge is Power', critically important, one would have thought, for those set on punching above their weight. In the event, it was not knowledge but rather superficial and naive assessments of regional political figures that led to precipitate disbursement of largesse (in the shape of recognition of states, membership of the UN, IMF, World Bank, etc.) and thus loss of the means to exert pressure, turning a blind eye to the unsavoury actions of perceived 'friends', and the stigmatisation of victims as aggressors. The price of the initial wrong-headedness has been thousands of lives physically or emotionally destroyed. But there are those who seek to salve their consciences by stressing how the (to them) fundamental principle of preserving territorial integrity has at least been upheld. Self-obeisance before this (to my mind, rather shallow) altar has resulted, as far as the Caucasus (former USSR) is concerned, in the absurd paradox of the Western democracies acting to buttress Stalin's often arbitrary drawing of borders. However, the empty symbolism of political virility demands that mistakes once made cannot be acknowledged, and, despite much trumpeting of the priority now attached to human rights, even the present HMG callously continues to accept the blockade imposed by Russia from late 1995 on Abkhazia for having had the temerity successfully to defend itself when attacked. The lessons are certainly there but palpably have yet to be learnt.

⁸From the article 'Demons dance as the West watches', *The Observer* (18 Dec), reprinted from *The New York Times* and written in connection with the publication of his novel 'Our Game', which was set against the back-drop of the Ingush-North Ossetian dispute.

In view of monies paid to the Russian exchequer during and since the Chechen war and as Moscow has cut budgets to Russian Federation republics, Bob Chenciner has advanced an intriguing proposal in a recent issue of *War Report* (52, June/July 1997, 14-15), namely that 'the World Bank...pay part of the next loan[-]instalments destined for the Russian Federation directly to the government of Ichkeria [Chechenia]'. I would urge consideration of parallel moves in the Georgian-Abkhazian stand-off, coupled with immediate lifting of the blockade. A regional conference under the joint-auspices of the UN and Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organisation (UNPO, The Hague) should then be convened, about a decade too late of course, to help provide a forum for discussion, and ultimately perhaps even resolution, of all outstanding problems.

Ironically, the curse of political pseudo-virility lies just as heavy over the opportunities to study them as over Caucasian minorities themselves. In the continuing debased atmosphere of political debate whereby it is the minimum sustainable taxation-level that determines public policy in education as elsewhere the survival of much that we prize is at stake⁹. Education, particularly in the humanities, is primarily about the instilling of values that have no easily identifiable market-price. Indeed, what price *can* be placed on knowledge, the search for, and dissemination of, which is, or should be, the academic's *raison d'être par excellence*? But as institutions are ever more compelled to seek private funding, reluctance to publish material uncomfortable for potential funders, whether individuals or governments of the countries where research is conducted, is likely to pose an ever greater obstacle to the truly fundamental principle of independent scholarship. I hope all present readily agree that this tendency should be strenuously resisted, along with attempts to reduce the range of academic disciplines available in our universities. For, as in the 1940s, one can never foresee when expertise in this or that recondite field might suddenly become of national importance.

I wish to close with a suggestion that might prove an aid in the battle for language-survival and which has arisen out of my professional observations of the last 22 years; it, thus, unites my twin themes this evening.

Sociolinguists have described a phenomenon they style Linguistic Insecurity. What is meant by this term can be demonstrated by a bemused query from the then 80 year-old, almost monolingual mother (now deceased) of my main Mingrelian informant back in 1982 prompted by seeing her son plied with questions from me, namely: 'Mingrelian is of no use even to us Mingrelians, why does this Englishman need it?'. Such attitudes have to be overcome through education. One component of this process must, I feel, be the teaching of reading and writing in *all* the still extant Caucasian languages, at least to

⁹ Whilst I would be the last person to cast aspersions on anyone who had the immense good fortune to receive his secondary education at Doncaster Grammar School for Boys (as was), for as such Lord Ron Dearing is a fellow Old Danensian, is there not a supreme irony in the fact that the fate of higher education-funding should be placed in the hands of the man who, wearing a different directorial hat, headed the syndicate that won the franchise to handle the National Lottery?

some basic level of proficiency, to their native speakers, thus removing from them the stigma, noted above, attaching to non-literary speech-forms. Payment for the preparation of suitable teaching-materials and perhaps even training of personnel should fall within the scope of UNESCO's remit¹⁰. The Georgian script would serve for the whole Kartvelian family (and, given its geographical isolation, arguably for Bats too, as in a 1984 Bats-Georgian-Russian dictionary), though whether this would be preferable for the Laz in Turkey as against a Roman script based on the Turkish model is debateable¹¹.

I published in 1995(c) my ideas for how Abkhaz might be written in just such a Roman script incorporating Turkish practices (e.g. writing 'c' for the sound [ç]) and restricting the letter-shapes to what is available on a Turkish type-writer. This was done in recognition of the fact that the majority of Abkhazians live in Turkey, where they do not read and write Abkhaz, are not going to learn expanded Cyrillic for the purpose, and cannot be assumed to possess computers, for which any letter-shapes would suffice. This work built on a previous suggestion for Adyghe by my esteemed German colleague, Monika Höhlig, again recognising that most Circassians are found in Turkey, where the language is similarly in decline. In a forthcoming article (b) I have adapted my 1995 system, incorporating an idea of my colleague (Dr. Slava Chirikba), and extended it in a way that should cope with any of the sound-systems attested in the North Caucasus, for even literary languages here are burdened with cumbersome Cyrillic-based scripts, which are often more a bar than a stimulus to learning. Example 17 illustrates the first line of an Æsop fable, namely 'One day the north wind and the sun had an argument over which of them was the stronger', from a cross-section of North Caucasian languages represented in this script just to give a quick impression of its appearance -- the accompanying, basically IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet), transcription will give those familiar with it a hint of the range of sounds to be accommodated. Chechen under the late Gen. Dzh. Dudaev abandoned Cyrillic, though I have not seen any account of its new Roman orthography. And serious thought should, I feel, be given to following Chechen's lead, whatever scheme be ultimately adopted. I am currently contemplating the preparation of an edition of the Abkhaz Nart sagas with English translation and grammatical notes as my next project (with the approval and help of my in-house collaborator and native speaker!), and it would be preferable if the Abkhaz text could be written in just such a generally accepted script.

¹⁰I am grateful to Lord Eric Avebury for his observation after the delivery of this lecture that the Organisation for Security and Coöperation in Europe (OSCE) might be a possible funder for such work on the basis of the Copenhagen Declaration (articles 32-36).

¹¹In fact, my German colleague Dr. Wolfgang Feurstein some years ago devised such a writing-base for the Laz in Turkey (see Ascherson 1995.203-209). A primer containing this script with the Georgian-based equivalent on facing pages was produced in Germany in 1991 (see T'amt'ruli), and Selma Koçiva published in 1997 a small book of her poems in this script with the title 'Nena Murunəxi'.

Example 17. First sentence of 'The North Wind and The Sun' from a cross-section of North Caucasian languages in a suggested Romanised script plus IPA transcription:

Abkhaz

zn1 àyûadatûiy apşëy àmrey eysëyt' rìwa eyhà yìgûgûow fûa.

[znə 'aʊadətʷi: a'pʃei 'amrei ei'seit' ei'hə 'jəɣʷɣʷo:ɔw hʷa]

Abaza

zn1k' ameriÿztiy apşabaştawiy baz yatsàst' -- rìts'a yixiàxûiwda fûa.

[znək' ama'ri:ʃti: apʃabaʃtawi: baz ja'tsast' 'rəts'a jə'xaxʷu:ɔda hʷa]

West Circassian (Temirgoi dialect)

zegûerem t1Rej1mr1 t1Remr1 anañ tēş1r yazeremRaş'ow zeneqûeqû1Rex.

[zegʷerem təβezəmɾə təkemɾə anañ t̪eʃər jazeremβaʃ'o:ɔw zeneqʷeqʷəβex]

Avar

tso nuxat seweriyab horots:a wa baq'utsa hor k'ob jo baleb buk'ana, kinab hezda hor k'osan q'uwatap bugeban.

[tso nuxaɬ: sewerijab horots:a wa baq'utsa hor k'ob jo baleb buk'ana kinab hezda hor k'osan q'uwatap bugeban]

Bats

ts'q'e matxona, maxana buñ bañ menux upr zora" da vai-ainû.

[ts'q'e matxona maxana buñ bañ menux upr zorã da vai-ainʷ]

If this suggestion helps in any way to facilitate the preservation of even just one North Caucasian tongue, I personally could derive no greater pleasure. Why, after all, should not study make a contribution to the continued existence of the entity studied? Let us hope that all our speech-communities find the means to live side by side in harmony and that never again will one have to report anything akin to the statement set out as Example 18, recorded from Ubykh's last speaker by Dumézil's pupil and successor as main investigator of Ubykh, Professor Georges Charachidzé of Paris:

Example 18. The death of Ubykh:

'y əzaq'a:la a-tʷaX ə'bza a-tʃa-'q'a

this-by.means.of the-Ubykh-language it-end-PAST

'In this way has the Ubykh language come to an end'

Thus, all that remains is to reveal the solution to the teaser posed in relation to Example 12 -- in a word, X^wazh^warpæs departed happy. I trust that your reading of this lecture leaves you feeling the same.

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