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17106A/1595 22-128 Georgian

Georgian is spoken in the (now former Soviet) Republic of Georgia, in the Ingilo district of Azerbaydzhan, by residents of former Georgian territories now within Turkey, by descendants of Georgians transplanted to Fereydan in Iran by Shah Abbas (17th century), and by small emigré-communities in some Western countries (France, America).

The 1989 Soviet census counts 3,983,115 'Georgians' for the whole Soviet Union, 98.2% of whom claimed native-speaker command of the language (99.7% of those within Georgia itself). This, however, is misleading, for those here styled 'Georgians' include Georgians proper plus the related Mingrelians, Svans and the relatively few Laz resident inside the USSR; additionally included are the circa 6,000 speakers of North Central Caucasian Bats (Ts'ova-Tush), who inhabit one east Georgian village and represent the entire tribe. All of the perhaps 80,000 Svans and most of the maybe one million Mingrelians will have Georgian as their second language through receiving their education in Georgian-language schools during the Soviet period.

Georgian belongs to the Kartvelian (South Caucasian) family, whose other members are Mingrelian, Laz and the archaic Svan. The first two are close enough to be regarded by Soviet linguists as mere dialects of a single language (Zan). No genetic link with any other language(-family) even within the Caucasus has yet been demonstrated.

With fifteen centuries of texts it is customary to periodise thus: Old Georgian (5th-11th centuries) => Mediæval (12th-18th centuries) => Modern (post-1800). Iranian and, latterly, Russian lexical influences are marked; Greek, Armenian, Arabic and Turkish loans are also noticeable.

The oldest inscription dates from c.430 A.D. at a site near Bethlehem. Within Georgia the oldest inscription (494) belongs to the Bolnisi church. Iak'ob Tsurt'aveli's

'Martyrdom of Shushanik', apparently composed between 476 and 483, represents the first native work of literature, whilst the oldest dated manuscript hails from 864. The earliest manuscripts and inscriptions exhibit peculiarities in the marking of 3rd person indirect objects, from which they are named *ᲗᲗᲗᲗᲗ* 'with extra Თ' or *ᲗᲗᲗᲗᲗ* 'with extra Თ'; the nature of this distinction (diachronic vs dialectal) has been hotly debated. Little seems to have been written during the centuries of Mongol and Tatar depredations.

Georgian is written in a unique, wholly phonemic alphabet with 33 characters from left to right without any upper vs lower case distinction. The modern script *ᲛᲗᲗᲗᲗ* 'military; secular' evolved in the 11th century from its precursor *ᲗᲗᲗᲗᲗ* 'angular', which in turn developed in the 9th century from the oldest variant *ᲗᲗᲗᲗᲗ* 'rounded', which was probably devised in the 4th century A.D. on the model of Greek to aid the spread of christianity, adopted as the state-religion c.330. Even after the 11th century religious texts continued to be written in a combination of the two earliest scripts, called *ᲗᲗᲗᲗᲗ* 'ecclesiastical', such that the oldest served as majiscule (*ᲗᲗᲗᲗᲗᲗᲗ*) to the miniscule (*ᲗᲗᲗᲗᲗ*) of its successor.

Kartvelian phonology is reasonably straightforward, though there is a high tolerance of consonant-complexes even initially, especially in Georgian, which has the five basic vowels (Ბ Ბ Ბ Ბ Ბ) and 28 consonants. The family generally manifests the word-orders AN, GN, N-Postposition, SOV/SVO. Circumfixes abound. Verbs divide into transitives, intransitives, medials and indirects (with logical subject in the Dative); medials often appear intransitive but largely behave morpho-syntactically like transitives because the relevant forms are borrowed from corresponding transitives. Georgian (with Svan) preserves the feature whereby a transitive verb's arguments are case-marked in one of three ways determined by which of three tense-mood-aspect Series the given form manifests:

	I	II	III
Subject	Nominative	Ergative	Dative
Dir Object	Dative	Nominative	Nominative
Indir Object	Dative	Dative	Genitive+ <i>-n/s</i> 'for'

Mingrelian has extended the ergative marking of subjects by substituting Ergative for Nominative with intransitive and indirect verbs in Series II, thereby losing its ergative nature, whilst Laz has extended the ergative configuration horizontally to all transitive verbs regardless of Series. No unique Ergative morph can be reconstructed for proto-Kartvelian; Georgian's Ergative has the exponent *-n(a/n)*

The examples below mean 'The trainer peels vs peeled vs (has) seemingly peeled the fig'. Note the circumfix in 'trainer', the changes of case and the operation of verb-agreement through the two sets of pronominal affixes, indicated by subscripts:

*m+ts'vrtm+e/-i*    *lej v-s*    *{(Ø)-}prtakvm-i-s*  
 trainer-NOM<sub>i</sub>    fig-DAT<sub>j</sub>    (it<sub>j</sub>)-peel-PRESENT-he<sub>i</sub>

*m+ts'vrtm+e/-ma*    *lej v-i*    *{(Ø)-}prtakvm-a*  
                                     ERG<sub>i</sub>         NOM<sub>j</sub>    (it<sub>j</sub>)-peel-he<sub>i</sub>{AORIST}

*m+ts'vrtm+e/-s*    *lej v-i*    *{(Ø)-}v+prtakvm+i-s*  
                                     DAT<sub>j</sub>         NOM<sub>i</sub>    (he<sub>j</sub>)-peel[PERFECT]-it<sub>i</sub>

Georgian possesses a number of dialects, which can differ sharply from both one another (e.g. western Gurian vs north-eastern Khevsurian) and the literary standard, which is based on the norms of the central region of Kartli, wherein lies the capital, Tbilisi. Georgian is the only literary language within Kartvelian: early Soviet attempts to turn Mingrelian and (amazingly) Laz into literary languages failed. With a general choice

between education in Russian or Georgian following the introduction of universal schooling to eradicate illiteracy by the Soviets, most Georgians and Mingrelians have tended to choose Georgian schools for their children, particularly in rural areas; the absence of Russians in Svaneti meant that only Georgian schools were established here. No widespread knowledge of Georgian amongst Svans or even Mingrelians can be automatically assumed for the pre-Soviet period despite Georgian's role as the language of worship. Georgian has been making inroads at the expense of Mingrelian, especially in eastern Mingrelia, for at least a century, and the migration of thousands of Svans to lowland Georgia after the tragic winter of 1986-87 must raise fears for their retention of Svan when no longer living in compact, isolated communities. The designation 'Georgian' became obligatory for Mingrelians and Svans c.1930, since when there have been no accurate data for either ethnic numbers or first vs second vs third language-knowledge with respect to the Kartvelian peoples and their languages.

The languages to have undergone Georgian influence the most are naturally its congeners, Mingrelian and Svan, plus other languages spoken within Georgia such as Bats, (North West Caucasian) Abkhaz and (Iranian) Ossetic. As a feudal power throughout the Caucasus and source for the spread of christianity to the north Caucasus before the coming of islam Georgia has left some lexical traces here too.

#### Bibliography

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