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SOCIOLINGUISTIC METAMORPHOSIS IN POST-SOVIET GEORGIA: THE INFLUENCE OF RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH ON LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT: This sociolinguistic study explores the complex linguistic landscape of contemporary Georgia, emphasizing the influence of Russian and English on the Georgian language. Drawing on the Dictionary of Foreign Words (Tchabashvili, 1989), which contains over 15,000 entries, the study investigates the etymology of Russian-derived words in Georgian, tracing their origins and reflecting on the historical influence of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. The analysis highlights how Russian borrowings were transmitted through both direct interaction and as intermediary terms from European languages. Additionally, the study examines English borrowings, sourced from the Dictionary of Barbarisms, focusing on how globalization and Georgia's Western political alignment have led to the integration of English into various sectors of society. Special attention is given to linguistic phenomena such as barbarisms and necessary borrowings that arose due to the absence of equivalent Georgian terms. These linguistic shifts underscore the broader sociopolitical context of Georgia's post-Soviet transformation, where language policy and geopolitical changes continue to shape national identity. By analyzing these foreign influences, the study provides insights into how language acts as both a symbol of cultural continuity and a tool for adaptation in the face of globalizing forces. This research offers a dynamic view of Georgia's evolving linguistic identity within the larger framework of sociolinguistic change.

KEYWORDS: Russification, contact language, national language, language purity, Anglicisms, borrowing

1. Introduction

Language is a fundamental marker of national identity, often regarded as one of the most significant due to its immediate audibility and its dual role in both communication and symbolic representation of cultural identity. Unlike ethnicity or religion, language serves both as a practical means of communication and as an

intrinsic aspect of cultural and national identity. Attitudes toward language vary widely, ranging from symbolic reverence to pragmatic utility, and may oscillate between aversion and favor depending on the context. As a visible and audible aspect of identity, language frequently assumes a pivotal political role, often becoming a source of contention. While language policies are especially critical for smaller nations seeking to preserve their linguistic and cultural distinctiveness, they are by no means insignificant for larger states. In fact, powerful nations like Russia have historically implemented assertive language policies – domestically and in regions with significant Russian-speaking populations beyond their borders – using language as a strategic tool of influence and soft power shaping economic, political, and cultural ties with the global community.

In this sense, language policy is not merely a domestic matter but a determinant of a nation's identity on the international stage. In Georgia, the complex relationship between language policies and societal attitudes offers fertile ground for analysis. Historically, the Georgian language has been deeply cherished as a cornerstone of collective identity, long before the country's forcible annexation by the Russian Empire, where Russian became a secondary but dominant language. Furthermore, Georgia's linguistic heritage is enriched by its historical prominence in the ethnically diverse and multilingual Caucasus region.

The aim of this study is twofold: first, to examine the sociolinguistic context of contemporary Georgia through a dynamic perspective, characterizing it as a shared linguistic space shaped by the influx of foreign words; second, to investigate the influence of the Russian language on the state language alongside the unprecedented surge of English borrowings as key factors in shaping the country's linguistic environment. The findings of independent studies employing the comprehensive empirical approach proposed here will contribute to ongoing research and debates among Georgian scholars regarding the impact of English and Russian on the linguistic environment of Georgia. This study seeks to answer the following research question: How have Russian and English lexical borrowings shaped the linguistic identity and sociopolitical perceptions of the Georgian language in the post-Soviet era?

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative sociolinguistic approach, combining historical linguistic analysis with etymological research. Two primary lexical sources were used: The Dictionary of Foreign Words (ჭაბაშვილი/Chabashvili, 1989) for Russian borrowings, and the Dictionary of Barbarisms for English loanwords (მარგალიტაძე/Margalitadze, 2017). These dictionaries provided over 15,000 lexical entries, which were analyzed to trace the origin, semantic field, and frequency of foreign elements in the Georgian language. Particular attention was paid to patterns of borrowing, transmission (e.g., via intermediary languages), and sociocultural context. The analysis was supplemented by historical accounts of language policy in Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia, as well as secondary scholarly literature on language contact and identity. This method

enables a comprehensive view of how foreign influence reflects broader sociopolitical change.

3.1. The Georgian Language in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras

A nuanced understanding of Georgia's historical relationship with Russia is essential for analyzing current attitudes toward the Georgian language, the Russian language as a legacy of imperial and Soviet influence, and the country's various minority languages. This relationship, rooted in centuries of interaction, began with Georgia's annexation by the Russian Empire in the beginning of the 19th century, abruptly when Georgia became an independent republic in 1918 until the Russian Army invaded Georgia in February 1921, and extended afterwards through the Soviet era, during which Georgia experienced profound and lasting changes in its linguistic landscape.

Historically, the Georgian language held a prominent role as the region's *lingua franca*, symbolizing cultural and historical identity for Georgians. According to the 11th-century historian Leonti Mroveli, during the reign of King P'arnavaz in the third century BC, multiple languages were spoken in central Georgia. However, P'arnavaz is credited with elevating Georgian to the status of the principal language across the kingdom.

This linguistic dominance was disrupted in 1801, following the annexation of Georgian territories by the Russian Empire. Over time, Russian gradually supplanted Georgian as the official language of administration and even within the Church. By 1840, Georgian had been entirely removed from state affairs, despite the fact that Russian was neither widely spoken nor understood by the local population. From the 1860s to the 1910s, the imperial authorities launched a series of targeted policies aimed at promoting the Russian language and instilling Russian national values—part of a broader agenda of cultural unification across the empire (Suny, 1994).

Russia's persistent efforts to impose a language policy on all social strata with the ultimate purpose of exerting power in order to control, manipulate, and reign can be traced in deliberate efforts to encourage minority languages on the territory of Georgia through the creation of alphabets and elementary textbooks in the Megrelian, Abkhaz, and Svan languages that served ideological and political purposes to gradually ensure the replacement of Georgian by Russian and lead the country to Russification through promulgating Russian as the language of high culture and supreme power. As Rannut states: "Russification is a form of linguistic imperialism, referring to both official and covert ethnic and language policies which were implemented by the Russian authorities during the time of the tsarist empire and the Soviet Union, and continue to be implemented by the contemporary Russian Federation" (Rannut, 2020).

Between Georgia's declaration of independence in 1918 and its annexation by Soviet Russia in 1921—prior to the formal establishment of the USSR in December 1922—the policies of Russification were systematically dismantled. Georgian was reinstated as the sole official language of the territory, reflecting a

renewed emphasis on national identity. Tbilisi State University was established in 1918 as a Georgian-language institution, symbolizing the cultural and intellectual aspirations of the newly independent state. Additionally, in a striking move to assert linguistic sovereignty, the mass conversion of Russian typewriters to the Georgian script was mandated just days after the declaration of independence (Smith et al., 1998). However, this brief period of self-determination ended in February 1921, when the Red Army invaded, leading to the loss of Georgia's independence for the following 70 years.

From the 1930s onwards, Russian became a compulsory subject in Soviet schools across Georgia, typically introduced from the second grade, as part of a broader effort to promote Russification and foster monolingualism within the Soviet Union. While Soviet ideology officially promoted the equality of all national languages, in practice, Russian was prioritized as the language of interethnic communication and advancement. In the 1950s, the Soviet government reiterated the principle of linguistic equality in official party rhetoric and educational policy documents, though these declarations often contradicted the lived reality in non-Russian republics the political climate led to the dominance of Russian in education and government, making it the *de facto* state language by the 1980s. As a result, 82% of the Soviet population became fluent in Russian, driving widespread bilingualism (Suny, 1993). Officially, Georgian was designated the state language of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic—alongside Abkhaz in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia—according to the 1936 Soviet Constitution. In 1978, Moscow's attempt to revoke Georgian's state language status sparked massive demonstrations in Tbilisi, ultimately preserving the language's official status (Suny, 1994).

3.2 The Russian Language in Post-Soviet Georgia

Georgia declared its independence on 9 April 1991, several months before the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union on 26 December 1991. This declaration followed two significant preceding events: the tragic crackdown on an anti-Soviet, pro-independence peaceful demonstration in Tbilisi on 9 April 1989, during which 21 demonstrators were killed and hundreds injured by Soviet Army forces; and the referendum on independence held on 31 March 1991, in which over 90% of the population voted in favor of independence with the national language playing a crucial role in affirming sovereignty and defining national identity. Contrary to a common assumption that Russian was the official language throughout the Soviet Union, Georgian had official status in the Georgian SSR since 1924, and, from 1936, Georgian was recognized as the state language throughout Georgia, alongside Abkhaz in the Abkhaz ASSR. Nevertheless, in the post-independence period, the role of the Georgian language was further emphasized as a symbol of national unity and cultural revival (Artoni & Longo, 2020).

As a result of shifting language policies and national identity consolidation, many Russian speakers in Georgia were faced with a choice: learn Georgian or leave the country. Unlike the more restrictive language and citizenship approaches

adopted in Estonia and Latvia, Georgia implemented the inclusive “zero option” principle, automatically granting citizenship to all residents regardless of their ethnic or linguistic background. Nevertheless, the early years of independence witnessed a significant demographic shift. The proportion of ethnic Russians in Georgia fell from 7.3% in 1989 to 1.7% by 2002. This decline was not solely due to emigration, as is often assumed, but was also influenced by the absence of census data from the occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which were excluded from the 2002 census. This demographic transformation contributed to growing resentment toward the Russian language in parts of Georgian society. The changing linguistic climate was particularly evident in the media sector. While Georgian television had primarily used the Georgian language even during Soviet times, it had also aired several hours of programming supplied by Moscow. In the post-Soviet period, these Russian-language segments were fully discontinued, and domestic channels began broadcasting exclusively in Georgian. In January 2011, the government introduced amendments to the Law on State Support to National Cinematography, requiring that all foreign films be dubbed into Georgian further diminishing the public presence of the Russian language (Kozlov, 2010). These changes coincided with a growing presence of English-language international media in Georgia, symbolizing the country’s cultural and political reorientation toward the West.

Similarly, the presence of English-language international print media increased, aligning with the country’s broader linguistic shift. Advertising regulations further reinforced the use of Georgian, mandating that any non-Georgian text in advertisements be accompanied by an equivalent in Georgian, displayed in equal size, as per the 1998 amendment (18.2.98) to the advertising law. In higher education, language policies initially offered flexibility. Until 2005, students could pursue bachelor’s degrees in Georgian or Russian while taking Georgian language courses. However, subsequent reforms established Georgian as the primary language of instruction for both bachelor’s and master’s programs, with English occasionally used for specific academic contexts. These measures underscore the country’s broader efforts to solidify Georgian as the cornerstone of its linguistic identity.

Despite an overall decline in its usage since independence, the Russian language continues to occupy a notable sociolinguistic position in Georgia. It remains one of the most widely spoken languages in the country following Georgian, and in some regions, Azerbaijani and Armenian due to a complex interplay of historical, political, and social factors. A key contributor to the persistence of Russian in public and interpersonal communication has been the significant influx of Russian-speaking tourists and migrants, particularly following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This recent migration wave has reinforced the visibility and practical use of Russian, especially in urban centers such as Tbilisi and Batumi.

According to the National Tourism Administration of Georgia¹, Russian-speaking visitors comprise a significant portion of the country's overall tourism. Recent data reveals that Russia consistently ranks among the top countries for inbound tourism to Georgia, with the number of Russian tourists rising dramatically from 52,100 in 2015 to 99,400 in 2024 due to the Russian war in Ukraine. Consequently, Russian remains commonly spoken in major tourist hubs such as Tbilisi, Batumi, and other areas with high tourist traffic, where businesses, restaurants, and services often cater to Russian speakers.

Although Georgian is the state language, Russian continues to play an important role in the tourism sector, reflecting its broader significance in the linguistic landscape. Furthermore, the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war has resulted in an influx of Russian-speaking refugees from both Ukraine and Russia. This development has contributed to the continued use of Russian, further enriching the linguistic diversity of cities like Tbilisi and Batumi.

In the academic domain, Russian continues to maintain relevance, despite its reduced role in formal education since Georgia's independence. According to a 2023 report by the Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations (CCIIR),² supported by the Open Society Georgia Foundation, Russian was taught as an optional second foreign language in numerous public schools during the 2022–2023 academic year. A total of 54 general education institutions offered instruction in Russian – 11 as fully Russian-medium schools and 43 as bilingual Georgian–Russian streams. Approximately 16,228 students were enrolled in these programs, with the majority concentrated in urban areas such as Tbilisi, Rustavi, and Batumi. At the tertiary level, Russian remains an optional foreign language in many institutions. In programs such as Russian philology, proficiency in the Russian language continues to be a formal requirement for admission. Beyond instruction, Russian retains its importance in academic research particularly in the fields of history, political science, and sociology where access to Soviet-era archives and foundational publications written in Russian remains essential for scholarly work.

The legacy of Soviet rule, during which Russian functioned as the primary interethnic language across the USSR, contributes to its continued use in Georgia, particularly among older generations and segments of political and economic elites. While its role in contemporary diplomacy is limited, Russian may still serve as a pragmatic medium of communication in certain bilateral or multilateral contexts, particularly where legacy Soviet-era networks persist. However, it is important to note that Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Uzbek, and increasingly English are the dominant languages of diplomatic engagement in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. In the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia,

¹<https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/102/utskhoel-vizitorta-statistika>

²Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations and Open Society Georgia Foundation, *The Dynamics of the Development of Russian-Language Education in Georgia in the Context of the Russian-Ukrainian War*, Civil.ge, December 21, 2023 <https://civil.ge/archives/575346>

territories internationally recognized as integral parts of Georgia but under Russian occupation, Russian plays a dominant communicative role, especially in public administration and media. While comprehensive linguistic data from these regions is scarce, existing reports indicate that Russian often functions as the primary or co-official language alongside Abkhaz and Ossetian, respectively.

3.3 Globalization and Georgia's Western Orientation: Linguistic Shifts and Cultural Identity

In the post-independence era, particularly following the peaceful “Rose Revolution” of 2003, Georgia adopted a decisively pro-Western orientation, including aspirations for NATO membership. English has since emerged as the dominant foreign language, symbolizing both modernization and integration into global networks. Proficiency in English has become a critical asset for professional advancement, particularly among younger generations. As a result, Georgia’s contemporary linguistic situation reflects a marked decline in Russian language proficiency, accompanied by a steadily increasing demand for English.

The increasing prominence of English across nearly all domains of contemporary Georgian life reflects a natural and predictable development, shaped by Georgia’s pro-European political alignment, its “Back to Europe” policy, and the broader forces of globalization. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia firmly aligned itself with a Western political course. This pro-European orientation is deeply rooted in the nation’s historical experiences and cultural identity. The Georgian elite has long identified with Western values and consistently pursued integration with the West. Historically, whenever Georgia had the opportunity to define its own political trajectory, it demonstrated a clear preference for alignment with Europe. While Georgia’s identity has also been shaped by its interactions with neighboring regions, such as other post-Soviet republics and Middle Eastern states, its cultural and political imagination has remained anchored in European civilization. In this context, English, as a globally recognized lingua franca, has emerged as a key instrument of international communication. The Georgian elite, in particular, has prioritized English-language acquisition as vital for political and economic advancement. Consequently, English has acquired symbolic status in Georgia as an “ally language,” reinforcing its role in processes of modernization and global integration.

Georgian self-identification as a Western nation gained significant intellectual momentum in the early 20th century, particularly through the influence of the “Tsisperkhantselebi”- a group of young Georgian intellectuals educated in Russia and, in some cases, in Western Europe. This ideological orientation became especially visible during Georgia’s brief period of independence between 1918 and 1921, when the country actively sought to model its political and social institutions on European examples. However, it was only after the restoration of independence in April 1991 that Georgia decisively turned toward Western Europe as a comprehensive political and cultural model. In the

post-Soviet period, this shift also influenced contemporary linguistic patterns, as the acquisition of English became increasingly associated with academic achievement, professional mobility, and integration into global networks.

The early 21st century saw the emergence of a new social class of intellectual youth, many of whom pursued higher education abroad and later established influential non-governmental organizations in Georgia. These individuals frequently incorporate Anglicisms into their speech, reflecting the linguistic impact of their international education and experiences. One of the key factors driving the growing demand for English in Georgia is globalization, a complex social process marked by increased interconnectedness across economic, political, cultural, environmental, and linguistic domains. This phenomenon has diminished the relevance of traditional borders and boundaries. However, globalization carries both positive and negative implications for language use. While it has created opportunities for linguistic exchange, it has also posed a threat to languages with limited diffusion, such as Georgian, contributing to their decline.

The global dominance of English presents a significant challenge to smaller languages, often resulting in their marginalization or even endangerment, along with the cultural heritage they convey. In the case of Georgian, the increasing prestige and functional dominance of English has contributed to a visible retreat of the Georgian language in specific societal domains—particularly in technology, digital media, and higher education (Tabatadze & Gorgadze, 2025). Most software interfaces, programming tools, and technical resources widely used in Georgia are available only in English, while online media platforms targeting younger demographics increasingly favor English-language content. Furthermore, English has become the preferred language of instruction in a growing number of elite private and international schools, especially in Tbilisi, reinforcing its association with academic excellence and socio-economic advancement (CCIIR, 2023)³. According to the same report, a rising number of preschools and extracurricular institutions also adopt English as the primary medium of instruction. This shift in educational preferences has led many urban middle, and upper-class families to prioritize English acquisition from an early age, often at the expense of their children's full proficiency in Georgian. The Georgian government has responded to these trends by adopting policies aimed at preserving the functional domains of the state language. In May 2025, the Parliament of Georgia passed a legislative amendment mandating Georgian as the primary language of instruction in public higher education institutions, citing concerns over the long-term sociolinguistic impact of English-language dominance (Parliament of Georgia, 2025)⁴. While such measures may slow the

³ Center for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations (CCIIR). (2023). *Language Policy in Georgia: Situation Analysis and Research Findings*. UNAG/USAID. <https://civil.ge/archives/569989>

⁴ Parliament of Georgia. (2025, May 13). *Mandatory Georgian language instruction in higher education—First reading approved*.

marginalization of Georgian in formal education, the broader sociolinguistic implications of English prestige and parental preferences continue to challenge the vitality of the national language in informal and digital contexts.

Beyond education, English has increasingly influenced various sectors, including technology, diplomacy, media, medicine, shipping, and fashion, further entrenching its role in global communication. While Russian held a dominant position in Georgia for nearly two centuries, serving as the *lingua franca* during the Soviet era, English has largely replaced it in recent decades. These linguistic shifts reflect broader geopolitical changes, particularly the ideological convergence of formerly divided global powers under the forces of globalization. Western civilization, with its political, social, and cultural influence, has established a new global paradigm in which English serves as the primary language of international communication. This transition underscores the profound impact of globalization on national languages and cultural identities, exemplified by the evolving role of Georgian in a rapidly changing world.

3.4 Linguistic Influence of Foreign Languages on Contemporary Georgian

Political and social developments over the past two centuries have profoundly influenced the contemporary Georgian language, particularly its vocabulary. This section examines the impact of two dominant foreign languages, Russian and English. The Russian language was not merely a foreign language, but the institutional language of an empire under which the modern Georgian nation and its literary standard were shaped. Unlike other conquerors' languages, Russian was not adopted through voluntary mimicry, but was systematically imposed through education, governance and elite cultural structures. Proficiency in Russian was essential for social mobility and access to higher education, reinforcing the imperial narrative that equated the Russian language with progress and civilization. Although imperial ideology often sought to marginalize Georgian language and culture, Georgians have long taken pride in their rich historical and cultural heritage, using it as a means of resisting political domination. This ideological and institutional pressure resulted in significant lexical influence. Russian-origin words entered Georgian across various domains, particularly in technical, administrative and colloquial registers. Many such terms remain in active use, often preserving both semantic and phonological similarities with their Russian counterparts (Antadze-Malashkhia & Niankini, 2021).

Soviet-era terminology committees and bilingual publications further entrenched Russian-based scientific and bureaucratic vocabulary into Georgian discourse (Margalitadze & Meladze, 2016). Even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian continues to be spoken in Georgia. According to the 2014 national census, approximately 0.7% of the population, or around 26,500

individuals, identified as ethnically Russian (Minority Rights Group International, 2023)⁵, while about 1.2% of the population, or nearly 46,000 people, reported Russian as their mother tongue (IIAB, 2015)⁶. Earlier estimates from 2004 indicated that as many as 130,000 individuals spoke Russian natively and up to 1.7 million used it actively, although only a small percentage, roughly 1%, reported using Russian as their primary daily language. This reflects a broader post-colonial dynamic in which the language of the former empire continues to function in specific domains, particularly among older generations and ethnic minorities, despite a significant shift toward Georgian and English among younger cohorts. This linguistic legacy is further compounded by the historical depth of Russian influence on Georgian itself. The two-century-long history of Georgia, first as part of the Russian Empire and subsequently as a constituent republic of the Soviet Union, has resulted in the incorporation of a considerable number of foreign words into the Georgian language. This influx of foreign vocabulary can be attributed to both direct borrowings from Russian and the transmission of European terms through the Russian language. The Academic Dictionary of Foreign Words, published in the 1980s (ჭაბაშვილი/Chabashvili, 1989), lists over 15,000 lexical entries. Through a comprehensive etymological analysis of these word entries, we identified 493 words that had entered Georgian via Russian by the end of the 20th century, despite not being etymologically of Russian origin. Many of these words are of Indo-European origin, having entered Georgian through Russian, which itself belongs to the Indo-European language family. As a result, numerous Indo-European terms present in the Russian lexicon were subsequently borrowed into Georgian, which led to the so-called partial “Europeanization” of Georgian through the intermediary of Russian.

The process has a twofold result: on the one hand, new words penetrated the Georgian literary language, and on the other, loanwords gave rise to synonymous word pairs eg. Fr. *resultat* < Russ. *результат* < Geo. *რეზულტატი* [*resultati*] Georgian synonym – *შედეგი* [*shedegi*] (result); Ger. *Experiment* < Russ. *эксперимент* < Geo. *ექსპერიმენტი* [*eksperimenti*] Georgian synonym – *ცდა* [*tsda*] (experiment); Fr. *talent* < Russ. *талант* < Geo. *ტალანტი* [*talanti*] Georgian synonym – *ნიჭი* [*nichi*] (talent); Lat. *corruptio* < Russ. *коррупция* < Geo. *კორუფცია* [*koruftsia*] Georgian synonym – *მეერთამეობა* [*meqrtameoba*] (corruption); Lat. *expertus* < Russ. *эксперт* < Geo. *ექსპერტი* [*eqsperti*] Georgian synonym – *მცოდნე* [*mtsodne*] (expert); Lat. *compensatio* < Russ. *компенсация* < Geo. *კომპენსაცია* [*kompensatsia*] Georgian synonym – *ანაზღაურება* [*anazghaureba*] (compensation); Lat. *publicus* < Russ. *публикация* < Geo. *პუბლიკაცია* [*publikatsia*] Georgian synonym – *ნაშრომი* [*nashromi*]

⁵ Minority Rights Group International. (2023). Georgia – Russian Minority. Retrieved July 6, 2025, from <https://minorityrights.org/country/georgia>

⁶ Institute for Information and Analysis in the Balkans (IIAB). (2015). Demographic Data on Georgia's Language Groups. Retrieved July 6, 2025, from <https://iiab.me>

(publication); Lat. *progredi* < Russ. *порпесс* < Geo. *პროგრესი* [*progresi*] Georgian synonym – წინსვლა [*tsinsvla*] (progress), etc.

Additionally, the influence of Russian has contributed to the persistence of numerous barbarisms in Georgian, many of which have yet to be fully eradicated. These barbarisms mainly belong to the domains of either common household or technical equipment eg. Russ. *шкаф* < Geo. *შკაფი* [*shkafi*] Georgian literary term – კარადა [*karada*]; Russ. *стол* < Geo. *სტოლი* [*stoli*] Georgian literary term – მაგიდა [*magida*]; Russ. *отвёртка* < Geo. *ატვიორტკა* [*atviortka*] (screwdriver) Georgian literary term – სახრახნისი [*sakhrakhnisi*]; Russ. *Прокладка* < Geo. *პრაკლადკა* [*prakladka*] (Gasket) Georgian literary term – შუასადები [*shuasadebi*]; Russ. *гайка* < Geo. *გაიკა* [*gaika*] (Nut) Georgian literary term – ქანჭი [*qanchi*]; Russ. *колодка* < Geo. *კალოდკა* [*kalodka*] (brake pad) Georgian literary term – ხუნდი [*khundi*]; Russ. *развал* < Geo. *რაზვალი* [*razvali*] (Camber) Georgian literary term – ნახარი [*nakhari*]; Russ. *лобовое стекло* < Geo. *ლაბავოი* [*labavoi*] (windshield) Georgian literary term – საქარე მინა [*saqare mina*]; Russ. *отражатель* < Geo. *ატრაჟატელი* [*atrjhateli*] (reflector) Georgian literary term – შუქამრეკლი [*shuqamrekli*]; Russ. *поднос* < Geo. *ფოდნოსი* [*podnosi*] (tray) Georgian literary term – ლანგარი [*langari*] and many others (Margalitadze, 2017).

One of the distinctive aspects of the Georgian-Russian linguistic relationship is the sphere of slang vocabulary. A considerable number of both Russian and etymologically non-Russian slang lexical items can be found in Georgian jargon, which has emerged from the Russian-speaking social environment within Georgia. Some of these terms may appear as foreign or barbaric at first glance, but due to their specific usage and regional spread, they are classified as slang. For example: Russ. *задний* (*zadni*) < Geo. *ზადნი* [*zadni*] meaning 'back' and *და-ზადნა* [*dazadna*] meaning 'to go back' or 'to return the car'; Russ. *крыша* (*krysha*) < Geo. *კრიშავს* [*krishavs*] meaning 'to protect'; Russ. *стрелка* (*strelka*) < Geo. *სტრელკა* [*strelka*] meaning 'date', etc.

Over the past thirty years, political and social changes in Georgia have increasingly exposed the Georgian language to English influence, resulting in deviations from standardized norms, including linguistic errors and stylistic inconsistencies. However, we argue that the impact of English on Georgian warrants careful examination, as its effects may not be as detrimental as often assumed. While English interference can lead to linguistic conflicts, it also promotes bilingualism and literacy development, thereby enhancing the ability to acquire knowledge and succeed in a globalized world. Therefore, language policymakers must strike a balance between preserving linguistic purity and managing English borrowings to support the standardization of the national language. Given that the influence of English is closely linked to recent social and political changes in Georgia, this study will explore the linguistic shifts in tandem with the external factors that have shaped the country's linguistic landscape.

Transition of the country to a new market economy system caused the emergence of a new stratum of society – businesspersons. Let us consider the most obvious example of the term “businessman”. The equivalent term of the English “businessman” in Georgian is საქმოსანი [*sakmosani*]. However, throughout the Soviet period, it had acquired a negative connotation since the meaning was connected with illegal financial activities. Thus, the loan word ბიზნესმენი [*biznesmeni*] gained firm footage in Georgian vocabulary, substituting the native equivalent. Other terms that penetrated into Georgian vocabulary in the 1990s due to economic changes are as follows: ვაუჩერი [*vaucheri*] (voucher); პრივატიზაცია [*privatizatsia*] (privatization); ბროკერი [*brokeri*] (broker). All of these terms were connected with a new economic system. Thus, the terms came together with new concepts and notions.

The mid-1990s were marked by the emergence of two new social layers—a new bourgeoisie that consisted of celebrities who proclaimed themselves to be the elite of the country and a new generation in close contact with the elite, who created and promoted the new lifestyle in Georgia. The language of the representatives of this segment was especially characterized by the wide usage of English words. Frequent usage of the Anglicisms that corresponded to words of common usage gave rise to cases of substitution. Native words were partially replaced by words of English origin where in the majority of the cases there was no need for substitution, and this caused the infiltration of barbarisms. Take, for instance, the following examples: თინეიჯერი [*tineijeri*] (teenager) replaced the Georgian მოზარდი [*mozardi*]; შოპინგი [*shopingi*] (shopping) replaced საყიდლებზე სიარული [*sakidlebze siaruli*]; ივენთი [*iventi*] (event) – ღონისძიება [*ghonisdzieba*]; არტი [*arti*] (art) – ხელოვნება [*khelovneba*]; ნიუსი [*niusi*] (news) – ახალი ამბები [*akhali ambebi*]; ფართი [*parti*] (party) – წვეულება [*tsveuleba*].

Accessibility to cable television, on the one hand, and the popularity of TV channels such as CNN Eurosport, Fashion TV and MTV, on the other hand, turned out to be one more reason for the penetration of barbarisms and jargon of English origin into the discourse of a new generation. As examples we have the following: ლაითი [*laiti*] (light), კულ [*kul*] (cool), დეიტი [*deiti*] (date), ჰაი [*hai*] (hi), ოკეი [*okei*] (okay), etc. The most interesting case is connected with the word ბაი (bai, bye) which replaced another jargon of Russian origin პაკა, (Russ. пока). The words ფეშენი [*fesheni*] (fashion), ბრენდი [*brendi*] (brand), ბაიერი [*baieri*] (buyer), ლუკი [*luki*] (look), etc. are the examples of barbarisms connected with the popularity of Fashion TV with the youngsters.

The new technologies that started to appear in Georgia in the late 1990s brought a new wave of Anglicisms. The first word that entered the Georgian language was ესემესი [*esemesi*] (sms), and it was soon followed by სელფი [*selfi*] (selfie) and many more. With the growth of accessibility to the Internet, words connected with computers overflowed the language: იმეილი [*imeili*] (email),

მეილ-ბოქსი [meilboksi] (mailbox), „სეტინგი“ [setingi] (settings), აპი [api] (app.), დაუნლოუდი [dounloudi] (download), რესტარტი [restarti] (restart), სპამი [spami] (spam) are just a few to be mentioned in this regard. It is noteworthy that the penetration of the new technological terms caused the split of Georgian society into two: those who mastered English terms together with their native language and another group of people for whom this terminology was not familiar and only managed to learn them later. This kind of duality has become not so much a generational problem but rather a socio-economic phenomenon.

The political transformation of the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly in the context of Georgia's path toward independence⁷, was accompanied by a noticeable influx of politically and ideologically marked lexical borrowings. One such term, კოლაბორაციონიზმი [kolaboratsionizmi] (collaborationism), entered Georgian discourse with a strongly negative connotation, denoting cooperation with Soviet authorities during the final years of the regime. Similarly, words such as ოკუპაცია [okupatsia] (occupation), ოკუპანტი [okupanti] (occupant), and დეოკუპაცია [deokupatsia] (de-occupation) gained prominence, especially in connection with the presence of Russian military forces and growing demands for their withdrawal from Georgian territory.

During the same period, the Westernization of political discourse introduced terms that, while semantically equivalent to existing Georgian words, carried symbolic associations with democratic systems and modernization. For example, ელექტორატი [elektorati] (electorate) began to replace the native Georgian term ამომრჩეველი [amomrcheveli] (voter), not because of semantic inadequacy, but because of its perceived alignment with Western political culture. This idealization of the Western world also led to the substitution of native terms in everyday usage. Words such as მარკეტი [marketi] (market) began to replace მაღაზია [magazia] (shop), კოტონი [kotoni] (cotton) replaced ბამბა [bamba] (cotton), and დენტისტი [dentisti] (dentist) came to be used alongside or instead of both the international term სტომატოლოგი [stomatologi] (stomatologist) and the native კბილის ექიმი [kbilis ekimi] (tooth doctor). These lexical shifts illustrate not only linguistic borrowing but also ideological and cultural realignment.

The influence of English has also extended into the language of activism and civic engagement. Non-governmental organizations and younger academic professionals, many of whom are involved in civil society, frequently adopt English-based terminology. However, this specialized vocabulary may hinder effective communication with broader audiences. For instance, ქეისი [keisi]

⁷ The mass protests and national movement of 1988–1990 played a pivotal role in shaping political discourse and mobilizing society around the ideas of independence and democratic transformation. These events also fostered new ideological language. See Nodia (1995) and Wheatley (2005) for detailed analyses.

(case) is often used in legal and human rights contexts in place of Georgian equivalents such as შემთხვევა [*shemtkhveva*] (incident) or პრეცედენტი [*pretsedenti*] (precedent), serving as a marker of affiliation with international discourse. Similarly, ბულინგი [*bulingi*] (bullying) has begun to replace the native term ჩაგვრა [*chagvra*] (oppression), especially in youth and educational contexts. Such borrowings highlight not only lexical innovation but also the shifting identity of public discourse in post-Soviet Georgia.

NGOs' and activists' vocabulary often overlap with established Anglicisms in the media and marketing fields; for instance, words like პიარი [*piari*] (public relations) and its verb form, გაპიარება [*gapiareba*] (publicity); ჩელენჯი [*chelenji*] (challenge); ფეიკი [*feiki*] (fake); სტაფი [*stafi*] (staff); თიმი [*timi*] (team); ფიდბეკი [*fidbeki*] (feedback) and others can be easily detected in media and marketing discourses. The speech of the representatives of this class is saturated with Anglicisms. At an informal level, their language is also referred to as the "NGO language." It includes not only international academic jargon such as: ვორკშოპი [*vorkshopi*] (workshop); აბსტრაქტი [*abstrakti*] (abstract); ფეიჭიდი [*pieichdi*] (Ph.D.) and დედლაინი [*dedlaini*] (deadline) but also Anglicisms that replaced identical native words: კონტენტი [*kontenti*] (content), which is no different from Georgian შინაარსი [*shinaarsi*], as well as ნარატორი [*naratori*] (narrator) – მოხრობელი [*mtkhrobeli*].

Another sociolinguistic feature observed in segments of contemporary Georgian speech, particularly among speakers with limited formal linguistic training, is the tendency to pronounce foreign proper names according to English transliteration norms, regardless of the word's original language. For instance, one might encounter ვოლტერ ბენჯამინი [*wolter benjamini*] (Walter Benjamin) instead of the more phonologically faithful უოლტერ ბენჯამინი [*uolter benjamini*], or რიჩარდ ვაგნერი [*richard vagneri*] (Richard Wagner) instead of რიხარდ ვაგნერი [*rih'ard vagneri*]. These are not phonemic substitutions but rather allophonic variations that reflect stylistic imitation often shaped by perceived prestige rather than linguistic accuracy.

This phenomenon may be understood, in part, as a residue of past linguistic models: during the Soviet era, Russian translations of foreign academic texts consistently adapted all proper names to Russian phonology, which became deeply internalized by many Georgian speakers educated in that period. For example, older generations might still recall hearing names like Freud pronounced as ფრეიდ [*freid*], Hegel as გეგელი [*gegeli*], Heinrich Heine as გენრიხ გეინე [*genrikh geine*], or Hitler as გიტლერი [*gitleri*]. However, such forms are now largely considered outdated or incorrect within academic and educated circles, where Georgian phonological norms are consciously observed. The use of Russian-influenced pronunciation today, particularly when the original phonology is ignored in favor of English or Russian models, is often perceived as a mark of linguistic insecurity or insufficient education, rather than deliberate ideological

alignment. It reflects a stylistic, oral-speech register rather than the standard literary norm observed in academic writing.

Although Georgian is the official language of literacy and administration, English has increasingly taken on a privileged role in modern Georgia, particularly in elite education, international communication, and digital media. In this respect, English has replaced Russian as the dominant foreign influence, mirroring to some extent the sociolinguistic function Russian held during the Soviet period. Under these conditions, the modern Georgian language is experiencing a growing influence from English, which is reflected in the increasing presence of barbarisms – non-integrated foreign words used without adaptation to Georgian phonology or morphology (Margalitadze 2022, Gumbardze, 2020). These words are mainly the results of transliteration and are used in the Georgian language as expressive lexical units parallel to native denominations; for example, show – შოუ [shou] alongside წარმოდგენა [tsarmodgena]; draft – დრაფტი [drafti] alongside ნიმუში [nimushi]; manager – მენეჯერი [menejeri] alongside მმართველი [mmartveli]; leasing – ლიზინგი [lizingi] alongside იჯარა [idjara]; implementation – იმპლემენტაცია [implementatsia] alongside განხორციელება [gankhortieleba] promotion [promousheni]–პრომოცია [promotsia] alongside დაწინაურება/პოპულარიზაცია [datsinaureba/popularizatsia], etc.

We assume that any attempt to import the English lexis into Georgian needs a fundamental study with more critical perspective as the uncontrolled flow of words from any language may lead to the emergence of barbarisms rather than borrowings. Some of imported vocabulary pose a real threat to the purity of language as L2 interference may damage the system of the language. We agree with Margalitadze's viewpoint when she states that an uncontrollable use of English lexes contaminates the language and linguistic identity of the nation (Margalitadze, 2022). However, we should not forget that one of the reasons encouraging wide-scale borrowing from the English language is the borrowing of terms connected to different fields of activities due to the absence of semantic equivalence. The Georgian language, like other languages, faces the problem of providing native semantic counterparts for some foreign words. Because of that, some of the loanwords spontaneously begin to appear as samples of terminology or specialized lexis. The analysis of English loanwords that have emerged during the last thirty years reveals they are mostly terms or specialized lexis connected with new professions and they have either partial or zero semantic equivalents in the recipient language (Georgian). Subsequently, they do not pose a threat to the authenticity of the state language and have no negative impact on the language. Examples include the following: პოლიტიკური ესთებლიშმენთი [politikuri esteblishmenti] (political establishment), კრედიტ ოფიცერი [kredit ofitseri] (credit officer); დეველოპერი [developeri] (developer); ოკუპაციური თერაპია [okupatsiuri terapia] (occupational therapy); მერჩენდაიზერი [merchendaizeri] (merchandizer); ფრანზიზა [franchiza] (franchise);

აპლიკაცია [*aplikatsia*] (application/software program); ინფლუენსერი [*influenseri*] (influencer), etc.

A language faces the need for borrowing when there is a substantial lexical gap or when there is no semantically equivalent lexical unit in the language. In another case, borrowing is considered inorganic to the language and gives rise to the emergence of barbarisms. Polysemic loans are rare since borrowing is intended for filling some specific lexical gap. An important insight to be applied to our discussion here is that some of the borrowings which were adopted by Georgian via the Russian language during its dominance started to be re-borrowed again but with another meaning. This linguistic process has a twofold result and leads to the emergence of polysemic loans; moreover, it might lead to the emergence of homonymous pairs.

Let us consider some examples demonstrating this linguistic process. The word ფასილიტატორი [*pasilitatori*] (facilitator) was initially borrowed with the meaning of “a person with special qualifications, who shares his/her experience and is capable of helping students achieve educational goals.” But, throughout the last decade, it acquired a new meaning due to its English counterpart meaning “someone who helps a group of people understand their common objectives and assists them to achieve goals without taking a particular position in the discussion.” The word აუტსაიდერი [*autsaideri*] (outsider) was initially adopted as a sports term; however, due to English influence, it gained an additional meaning of “a person who does not belong to a particular organization or a group.”

The word რეზერვაცია [*rezervatsia*] (reservation) initially entered Georgian with the meaning “a designated area for the forced settlement of Indigenous populations,” reflecting its historical usage in colonial contexts such as North America, South Africa, and Australia. However, in contemporary Georgian, its meaning has shifted toward “booking,” particularly in the context of hotels and restaurants. Similarly, the term ამბიციური [*ambitsiuri*] (ambitious)—originally borrowed via Russian, where it carried a negative connotation of vanity or excessive self-regard—has recently acquired a more neutral or even positive meaning under the influence of English, as in ამბიციური პროექტი [*ambitsiuri proekti*] (an ambitious project). These semantic shifts, shaped by English-language influence and media usage, have raised concern among Georgian linguists and language policy experts. Scholars have warned that such borrowings may result in homonymic ambiguity and undermine the stability of the Georgian lexicon (Mchedlishvili, 2024; Goshkheteliani & Kikvadze, 2017).

The new words soon were fully integrated into the language and, as a consequence, many words attached Georgian morphological endings, forming in this way a set of nominalized verbs: დაგუგლვა [*daguglva*] (searching in Google); დამესიჯება [*damesijeba*] (messaging); დაპოსტვა [*dapostva*] (posting); დასეივება [*daseiveba*] (saving); დაჰაიდება [*dahaideba*] (hiding or removing a “friend” on Facebook so that you can no longer see each other); დასკრინშოტება [*daskrinshoteba*] (screenshot); დაშეარება [*dasheareba*] (to

share the post); დალაიკება [*dalaikeba*] (to put the sign “thumb up” on Facebook post), etc. It is obvious that the emergence of social networks played a decisive role in this process. It is in these virtual spaces that a parallel language arose, in which English words do not denote their Georgian equivalents but rather create parallel meanings. For example, ფრენდი [*frendi*] (friend) does not usually mean a “friend,” but a Facebook friend, often an unknown and virtual friend. The spread of social networks has a history of about fifteen years, but the new generations, whose socialization coincides with this period, have already mastered the jargon of social networks naturally and established new, English-Georgian mutations in their speech. Thus, we can predict that the oddness of these neologisms will disappear soon.

4. Conclusion

As T. Gamkrelidze insightfully observed, “We direct the entirety of our attention toward physical and biological ecology, often neglecting the critical issues of cultural ecology. Yet, the peoples of the world—particularly smaller nations—are no less profoundly concerned with the preservation of their national culture and language [...] than they are with the conservation of the physical environment” (Gamkrelidze, 1989, as cited in Margalitadze, n.d.)⁸. This perspective remains highly relevant in contemporary Georgia, where language continues to serve as both a practical tool and a powerful symbol of national identity.

This study examined how Russian and English lexical borrowings have influenced the linguistic identity and sociopolitical perceptions of the Georgian language in the post-Soviet era. By analyzing data drawn from dictionaries, lexical corpora, and sociolinguistic literature, we investigated the nature, frequency, and perception of borrowings, contextualizing them within broader historical and ideological frameworks.

The findings indicate that Russian and English borrowings function in fundamentally different sociolinguistic registers. Russian, the language of former imperial dominance, continues to evoke associations with cultural subjugation and political control. Although many Russian loanwords remain embedded in specific professional and colloquial registers, their presence is often viewed with ambivalence or resistance, reflecting an ongoing effort to reclaim linguistic autonomy. English, on the other hand, is associated with modernity, globalization, and Western alignment. English loanwords are widely used in business, technology, education, and youth culture, and while some view this as linguistic

⁸ Full bibliographic details of the original source: Gamkrelidze, T. (1989, January 13). ეკოლოგია და კულტურა. გაზეთი „ლიტერატურული საქართველო“, №2. [Gamkrelidze, T. (1989, January 13). Ecology and Culture. *Literary Georgia* (newspaper), No. 2.] The physical copy of this source could not be independently verified; the citation is derived from Margalitadze (n.d.).

intrusion, others embrace it as a pragmatic and even enriching linguistic development.

Thus, the Georgian case exemplifies a broader sociolinguistic phenomenon in postcolonial and transitional societies, wherein languages of former colonizers are often resisted for their symbolic burden, while global lingua francas like English are selectively adopted for their perceived cultural capital. This dual dynamics reveals that borrowing is not merely a linguistic process but one deeply shaped by ideology, identity politics, and historical memory.

By framing this process through the lens of cultural ecology, the study underscores the importance of linguistic adaptation as a marker of national resilience. It also contributes to existing literature by offering a comparative perspective that integrates both Russian and English influences—an approach rarely undertaken in previous studies, which tend to isolate one language's impact. Furthermore, this research provides insight into how sociolinguistic shifts can mirror broader geopolitical reorientations, particularly in contexts where language functions as both a communicative medium and a political symbol.

Looking ahead, these findings suggest the need for further investigation into how generational language attitudes, educational policy, and media discourse shape the trajectory of language contact in Georgia. As the country continues to navigate between historical legacies and global integration, maintaining a balance between linguistic preservation and functional openness will remain a central challenge—and opportunity—in Georgia's evolving cultural ecology.

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