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The Georgian Language: Threats and Challenges

Abstrakt (Język gruziński: zagrożenia i wyzwania). Jakie są te zagrożenia i wyzwania, przed którymi stają języki we współczesnych czasach globalizacji, gdy postęp i dobrobyt mówią dominującym językiem? I jak dalece mogą unikać wpływów najczęściej używanych języków? W jaki sposób języki mogą uczestniczyć w dialogu międzykulturowym i jednocześnie zachować swoją tożsamość? Artykuł stanowi próbę odpowiedzi na te pytania i koncentruje się na przykładzie języka gruzińskiego, którym posługuje się około 4 milionów osób. Przykład gruzińskiego jest znaczący z kilku powodów: a) jest to oficjalny język Gruzji i, aczkolwiek jest językiem urzędowym, polityka tego różnorodnego językowo kraju ma na celu ochronę innych języków regionalnych i etnicznych; b) z drugiej strony gruziński można uznać za język, którego żywotność jest zagrożona. Artykuł przedstawia tło historyczne, opisuje zagrożenia występujące w czasach sowieckiego reżimu i ich następstwa, a także koncentruje się na bieżącej sytuacji, polityce językowej, aktualnych wyzwaniach i ich przyczynach.

Abstract. What are those threats and challenges that languages face in a time of globalization, when progress and prosperity speaks the dominant language? And how far can they avoid the influences of the most widely spoken languages? How can languages participate in intercultural dialogue and keep their language identity at the same time? The paper provides an attempt to answer these questions and focuses on the example of the Georgian language, spoken by approximately 4 million people. The example of Georgian is significant for several reasons: a) it is an official language of Georgia, a country with great language diversity and therefore, as an official language its policy is designed to protect other regional and ethnic languages; b) on the other hand, Georgian can be considered as a language whose viability is under threat. The paper presents a picture of the historical background, describes the threats existing during and after the Soviet regime. It also concentrates on the current situation, language policy and current challenges.

Introduction: Globalization, Linguistic Diversity and Georgian

The ongoing wave of globalization together with the idea of creating common economic and cultural spaces has brought new challenges for languages. Open discussions

in academic circles focus on the role of globalization in the loss of human languages. Globalized communication and culture create a threat for local language varieties. People chose widely used languages for communication as well as for business deals and economic purposes. In 1991 at the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America Michael Krauss delivered a paper "World languages in crisis" in which he made a frightening prediction:

> The coming century will see either the death or the doom of 90% of mankind's languages. What are we linguists doing to prepare for this or to prevent this catastrophic destruction of the linguistic world? (Krauss 1992: 7).

According to Krauss endangered languages are significantly comparable to endangered biological species in the natural world:

> Surely, just as the extinction of any animal species diminishes our world, so does the extinction of any language. Surely, we linguists know, and the general public can sense, that any language is a supreme achievement of a uniquely human collective genius, as divine and endless a mystery as a living organism. Should we mourn the loss of Eyak or Ubykh any less than the loss of the panda or California condor? (Krauss 1992: 8).

In "Language Vitality and Endangerment", a document prepared by the UNESCO Ad hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, some statistics behind linguistic diversity are presented:

> About 97% of the world's people speak about 4% of the world's languages; and conversely, about 96% of the world's languages are spoken by about 3% of the world's people. Most of the world's language heterogeneity, then, is under the stewardship of a very small number of people. Even languages with many thousands of speakers are no longer being acquired by children; at least 50% of the world's more than six thousand languages are losing speakers. We estimate that, in most world regions, about 90% of the languages may be replaced by dominant languages by the end of the 21st century (UNESCO 2003: 2).

The UNESCO recommendations suggest putting forth strong cooperative efforts in countering these threats which could lead to languages vanishing.

> Many indigenous peoples, associating their disadvantaged social position with their culture, have come to believe that their languages are not worth retaining. They abandon their languages and cultures in hopes of overcoming discrimination, to secure a livelihood, and enhance social mobility, or to assimilate to the global marketplace (UNESCO 2003: 2).

In his book "English as a Global Language" (first published in 1997) David Crystal overviews the reasons and contexts explaining why the English language dominates as well as predicting mixed feelings of non-English language speakers:

> If you live in a country where the survival of your own language is threatened by the success of English, you may feel envious, resentful, or angry. These feelings are natural, and would arise whichever language emerged as a global language (Crystal 2003: 3).

In fact no languages can avoid these threats, including languages with deep-rooted written literary heritages. English solidifies its dominant position across five continents with an incredible speed. And its dominance increases primarily due to military and economic power and not due to a rich vocabulary or perfect grammatical structure, says French linguist Claude Hagège in one of his interviews, where he speaks about world languages under danger, and names the French language among them. A desire to dominate automatically involves a desire to eliminate others, says Hagège. As an explanation he adds that obviously he has nothing against the English language in general, but he is against financial benefits that sacrifice cultural and language varieties. He says he struggles to defend linguistic diversity (Hagège 2012).

An announcement prepared by the Arnold Chikobava Institute of Linguistics in Georgia (March-April 2009) considers Georgian as a candidate to be included in the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger:

> According to the European nations, UNESCO, and other international organizations language policy assessment and planning take into consideration historical background and experience of a country. If we follow the dynamics of local and global changes it seems evident that not only small languages are likely to disappear, but those national languages who have long written literary tradition and who became the victims of recent geopolitical and demographical catastrophes are also endangered. The threat from historical effects is of a great importance. The history of mankind preserves the facts of language extinction, even of those with a vast textual tradition (Institute of Linguistics 2009).

The Georgian Language and National Identity

Looking through history, the Georgian language has always faced many threats. What are those problems Georgian faces today? In the contemporary era of globalization there are many challenges but presumably the most serious factor is a threat that the Georgian language inherited from the Soviet past, and that threatens the status of the official Georgian language even today.

A brief look at the history of the Georgian language shows that it is the only one of the languages of the Caucasus that has a tradition of writing (and consequently literature) pre-dating the 19th century. The Georgian script seems to have been designed towards the close of the 4th century to aid the dissemination of the new religion of Christianity (Hewitt 2004: 1). The history of literary Georgian that gave rise to a standard variety of the language dates back to the first literary monuments, from the 5th century (Arabuli

2004: 12-13). The first grammatical book to deal with Georgian language standards is the anonymous XI-XII century 'Treatise on articles'. The first extensive Georgian dictionary was produced by Georgian scholar Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani (1658-1725). This was followed by the first native grammatical descriptions by Zurab Shanshovani (1737) and the Catholicos Anton I (separate versions dated to 1753 and 1767). However, the oldest known dictionary relating to Georgian was the 'Georgian-Italian Dictionary' *(Dittionario Giorgiano E Italiano)* compiled by Stefano Paolini, which, together with a 'Georgian Alphabet with Dominican Prayer' *(Alphabetum Ibericum sive Georgianum cum Oratione Dominicali)*, was the first Georgian printed book (Hewitt 2004: 1).

Scholars suggest that by the 12th century the Georgian language was already well standardized. A high degree of linguistic homogeneity is one of the characteristic features of the Georgian language (Arabuli 2004: 20-24): The language of today is recognizably the same as the language first recorded in AD 430 (Rayfield 2000: 9). However, in the second half of the 18th century the natural development of literary Georgian suffered a negative influence. This was related to the reform of the Catholicos Anton I (1720-1788) who developed the 'Theory of Three Styles', which meant using 'high style' for religious and philosophical writings, 'middle style' for historical and literary texts and 'low style' for colloquial speech. The 'Theory of Three Styles' was an artificial intrusion in the process of language development and the texts written following "Three Styles" principles were highly artificial and unintelligible. The 'Theory of Three Styles' resulted in conflicts between older and younger generations (the Conflict of Fathers and Sons), ending up with a victory of young reformers. In the second half of the 19th century a group of young reformers took an initiative to renovate the language and they restored one common language for all Georgians. They returned the language back to its natural life. Actually they tunneled a way to the process of language democratization and created a theoretical background for contemporary literary standards focusing on the natural development of a language (Arabuli 2004: 20-24).

This new language reform had a strong political leaning; it was a resistance to the policy of Russification that had become more systematic from the second half of the 19th century. And the struggle for the Georgian language was associated with the struggle for Georgian national identity. Even today language remains to be one of the important markers defining national identity of Georgians. "Georgian national identity is distinguished by the centrality of language as the strongest historical factor in national consolidation. Both Georgian and Western scholars have noted that linguistic foundation of Georgian nationhood, characterizing the Georgians as a 'highly language-conscious society'. Language seems to be the most important marker of *Kartveloba (Georgianness)* not only in the modern era, but also in all periods of documented history" (Amirejibi-Mullen 2012: 97-98).

'Motherland, Language, Faith' was the slogan of the reformers in the 19th century. And this slogan was revived during the Soviet regime when in 1978 the Government of the USSR proposed amendments for the constitution to declare Russian as the official (first) language in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. This proposal was followed by massive street protests in the country. The government planned to change

part of the constitution that declared Georgian the official language of the republic. Hundreds of students started protesting in Tbilisi, with the crowd estimated to number 5,000. The protests proved to be effective, and Georgian was retained. Georgians did not lose sight of the importance of their language and, in continuation of this nationalist spirit, undertook an official 'Georgian Language Program' in the 1980's, reaffirming the role of Georgian in education, political life, mass media, and print. As of 1989, 94 percent of Georgian children were enrolled in Georgian-language schools (Grenoble 2003: 118). Since then this date, April 14 has been celebrated in Georgia as a Day of the Georgian Language.

Language studies in Georgia have been especially intensive since 1918, the year when the first Georgian University, Tbilisi State University was founded. Tbilisi University was the first institution of higher education anywhere in the Caucasus, and from 1933 it provided a focus for the study of the region's languages when the Caucasian Language Faculty was founded (Hewitt 2004, 13). The beginning of scholarly research coincided with a start of a very tough period in Georgia's history: the establishment of the Soviet regime brought new language rules with Russian language dominance. However, Georgian scholars worked hard to pursue language studies in Georgia.

There are also a number of examples of the activities supporting language research. In 1921 the Academic Council for Terminology was established and its activities made a notable contribution to the development of the humanities and sciences in Georgia. In 1934 the Republican Commission for Georgian Language Standards launched a two-year monitoring and research project the results of which were accumulated in the publication "Georgian Language Standards" delivering the basic principles of standardization as well as a list of recommendations. In two decades the Commission obtained a permanent status, involving scholars, writers and the representatives of print media and in affiliation with the Institute of Linguistics in Georgia aimed at monitoring current tendencies in both colloquial and literary Georgian. It launched a series of publications: "Issues of the Georgian Speech Culture", which is still ongoing. A particular emphasis had been put on compiling dictionaries: in 1941 the Orthographic Dictionary was published followed by publishing the first volume of the Georgian Explanatory Dictionary (in eight volumes) in 1950 (Arabuli 2004: 30-34).

This body of scholarly work was an effective shield against Russian dominance. While nobody declared this openly the hidden implications can be found in the writings of Georgian scholars. In 1950, in the introduction of Georgian Explanatory Dictionary the famous Georgian linguist and the chief editor of the Dictionary Arnold Chikobava writes: "Georgian literary language is both a product and a tool of rich Georgian culture with a long history". In his introduction he puts a special emphasis on the importance of the Georgian language encouraging readers to treat the language as a marker of self-identification and Georgian culture in general.

> It is common knowledge that if a language (both colloquial and standard languages) is used as a tool for communication and thinking, it is alive. But a language dies if nobody uses it. An increase in the vital energy of a language depends on language uses

> and on the contrary, when a language has a limited platform, when its public basis is weakened and there is a decline in the number of speakers, a language continuously loses its life (Chikobava 1950: 005)[1].

This naturally leads to the question of the status of the Georgian language in the Soviet Union. The Georgian literary language was an official language of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (according to the 1938 Constitution, and also to the 1978 Constitution), as the Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia says (GSE 1986: 475). Russian had a dominant status throughout the Soviet Union. This meant that knowledge of Russian was compulsory for the Soviet citizens, including for the citizens of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Fluent knowledge of Russian was necessary to achieve a successful career as well as to have an access to information. Thus, Russian gained a position of high prestige in the Soviet Republics. In a number of them it was the main language of education. The linguistic picture in Georgia was slightly different. Georgian schools and universities maintained a high level of prestige despite the Russian language dominance during the Soviet regime.

> The impact of Soviet language policy on individual groups within the Caucasus has been as varied as the languages themselves. While the three titular groups (Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian) were guaranteed mother-tongue education from primary school through post-secondary levels, the many minorities were not (Grenoble 2003: 111-112).

Russian was the language of communication with non-Georgian ethnic groups, who lived and still live on the territory of Georgia. And of course, Russian was the language of international communication in the Soviet space. Nonetheless, since the events of April 14, 1978 the prestige of the Georgian language was even higher in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In 1991 Georgia emerged from the collapsing Soviet Union as an independent state, with the official Georgian language with approximately four million speakers. In accordance with Article 8 of the Constitution of Georgia, the official Language of Georgia is Georgian and the official language of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia is Georgian as well as Abkhazian (Article 4, Status of the official language, Law of Georgia on Official Language). But this new reality met new challenges and has brought about some changes in the linguistic picture of the country.

The Current Language Situation in Georgia

In general, languages that are spoken on the territory of Georgia can be divided into two groups: Kartvelian (South Caucasian) languages (the Georgian, Megrelian,

[1] Translations from Georgian made by the author.

Laz and Svan languages), and languages of the ethnic minorities living in Georgia, other than the Kartvelian languages.

There are four regions densely populated with non-Georgian speaking communities:

1) Abkhazian language speakers live in the region of Abkhazia, in the north-west part of the country on the shore of the Black Sea. Due to recent military operations and migration they have experienced a substantial decrease in population. Currently the region of Abkhazia is occupied by Russia.
2) Ossetian language speakers live in the northern part of Shida Kartli region, in the Kakheti region and in several villages of southern Georgia. Part of the territory where Ossetians live has been occupied by Russia since 2008.
3) Azerbaijani speaking communities are settled in Kvemo Kartli (southern Georgia) and Shida Kartli. The linguistic picture is different between these two parts . In Shida Kartli the language of education is Georgian while in Kvemo Kartli it is Azerbaijani .
4) Armenian language speakers live in south Georgia (Samtskhe-Javakheti) and the Tsalka district of Kvemo Kartli (in southeastern Georgia). Settlements of other ethnic groups (Russians, Kurds, Greeks, Ukrainians, etc.) are also found on the territory of Georgia but they are more dispersed (Gabunia et al. 2010: 4-10).

Communities speaking the Kartvelian languages (other than Georgian) are distributed as follows: Megrelian language speakers live in the western part of Georgia. Two regions populated by the Megrelian language speaking community (Gali and Ochamchire regions) are situated on the territory of Abkhazia currently occupied by Russia. The Laz language speaking community is very small (about one thousand speakers) and lives in the village Sarpi on the Turkish border. Most of the population lives in Turkey, on the Black Sea coast. Svan language speakers are settled in the northwestern part of Georgia, on the southern slopes of the Caucasus. Megrelian, Laz, and Svan speakers in Georgia identify themselves as Georgians. They frequently refer to their languages as “our kitchen language” or “our cradle language”. They use the Georgian language as a literary and second native language. Georgian is also a principle marker of the national identity they share with the rest of Georgians (Amirejibi-Mullen 2012, 102). The research project ‘Linguistic situation in contemporary Georgia’ had as its goal the study of the current status of the Georgian language as well as a sociolinguistic analysis of non-official languages. It presents the following results focused on the linguistic attitudes of Megrelian, Laz, and Svan speakers: most of the respondents consider these languages as of the low social status. These languages are not for the radio or the TV or for the official uses, they are only home languages, to communicate with family and friends, they say (Gabunia et al. 2010: 120).

> The study of the Kartvelian languages had always been one of the priorities of scholarly research in Georgia. Editing texts, compiling dictionaries and grammars are part of this research. The Law of Georgia on Official Language says:

The State continually facilitates the preservation and exploration of the Kartvelian Languages and dialects, which is one of the most significant preconditions for maintaining viability and resilience of the official language (Article 4, 3).

Obviously this kind of language diversity can give rise to problems and challenges. Currently the most serious problems threatening the status of Georgian as an official language have a political background. It is becoming ever more difficult to maintain the status of the Georgian language in the occupied territories. In 2009 the Institute of Linguistics in Georgia made an alarming announcement (Institute of Linguistics 2009):

> In Gali region, Abkhazia, that was inhabited completely with Georgian speaking population, Russian-Abkhazian joint administration issued new regulations for secondary schools (and there are 32 Georgian schools in this region) according to which learning Russian becomes obligatory from the first year. This means that gradually Georgian schools will be transformed into Russian schools. It is an example of purposely changing linguistic picture by violent means.

Today, when Georgia is under the threat of 'creeping occupation' and hence running a high risk of losing new territories, the threats to the Georgian official language have become more evident. These are the extracts from the online news edition *Netgazeti*:

August 9, 2017: "Beginning from September Georgian language groups for preschool education will be closed in Akhalgori which has been under the control of the de facto government of Tskhinvali since the war in 2008" (http://netgazeti.ge/news/212789/).

September 7, 2017: "The de facto government of Tskhinvali made an announcement: New regulations are established from September 2017. Learning Russian and Ossetian becomes compulsory from the first year at school" (http://netgazeti.ge/news/219279/).

The status of Georgian official language is also fragile in those regions that are densely populated by ethnic minorities. The leftovers of the Soviet Regime are reflected in the linguistic picture. During the Soviet Regime due to the Soviet educational and language policy, non-Georgian ethnic groups became the part of the Russian speaking community, and Russian was the language of communication between Georgians and other ethnic groups. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the situation changed, Russian lost its function as a communicative tool between different ethnic groups, but since the Georgian language proficiency is very low in these regions Georgian (as a state language) cannot take this function. Linguistic pictures are also different in different places. There are communities where Russian remains dominant while in other communities the language of the ethnic minority is in use.

> In the municipalities where representatives of national minorities are settled in communities, public authorities and local self-government bodies are entitled to establish procedures that are different from procedures provided for by the General Administrative Code of Georgia, in accordance with which, if necessary, translation of applications and complaints submitted to the local self-government bodies by persons belonging to the national minorities, and translation of the responses thereto may be required in the language of those national minorities (the Law of Georgia on Official Language, article 11, 4. See also articles 12, 2; 24).

However, Georgian language learning programs for ethnic minorities are actively in progress in Georgia; e.g. Ilia State University implements 'Georgian as a second language and integration program' targeted at university entrants who are members of ethnic minorities wanting to pursue their studies at higher education institutions of Georgia (www.iliauni.edu.ge).

Recently, the Georgian population of the region of Abkhazia also appeared to face a new challenge. Before the Soviet regime this population had a fluent knowledge of the two languages, Megrelian and Georgian. But during the Soviet times Georgian has been substituted by Russian. People spoke Megrelian as a home language and Russian as a global one for the Soviet space. Many of them had poor knowledge of Georgian, because they gained their education in Russian. Learning Russian had been encouraged by pragmatic needs, the Russian language was a tool for inter-ethnic communication in the territory of Abkhazia (and not only in Abkhazia), and on the other hand, it was easier to find a job with Russian (Gabunia et al. 2010: 145). And here is an extract from one of the interviews with a Megrelian speaking lady from Abkhazia:

> What language did you speak at home? – Russian and Megrelian. Which school did you go? – Russian. Why? – Because we knew Megrelian, we knew Georgian and we needed Russian. We needed to know Russian fluently for relations. We spoke Russian with Abkhazians, we spoke Russian with Armenians, with Russians, of course. That's why (Gabunia et al. 2010: 145-146).

When refugees from the region of Abkhazia were cut off from their native linguistic environment and found themselves in a new environment they came across obstacles in communication. The project "Linguistic situation in contemporary Georgia" (published in 2010) contains stories of those people who learned Georgian later, when they understood that it was necessary to learn the language properly. After the war in the 1990s many refugees from this region moved to the different linguistic environment (mainly to Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia) and they came across difficulties in communication: Russian could not fulfill the function of the 'international language' any more. In fact, speaking Russian irritated the local population. The population of Tbilisi did not speak Megrelian and the refugees speaking Megrelian did not know Georgian well. As one interviewee says:

> 'I learned Georgian here in Tbilisi. And my daughter in-law who did not know a single Georgian word and used to speak only Abkhazian and Russian, now speaks Georgian even better than me,' one of the interviewees says (Gabunia et al. 2010: 143).

The present situation with Megrelian speakers is that two or three decades ago fewer people spoke Georgian than today in Zugdidi, one of the main towns in the west. However, the situation is different between towns and villages. In some villages there are some children who do not speak Georgian before they go to school (Gabunia et al. 2010: 144). Problems of this kind do not exist in the Svan language community; everybody in this community speaks Georgian. The Laz language speakers living on

the territory of Georgia also speak Georgian (the village Sarpi on Turkish border is the only compact settlement of Laz speakers on the territory of Georgia).

> What makes the present and the future different from the past is that the ebb and flow of languages, accompanying shifting economic, political and military relationships, once a local and regional phenomenon, has now become more visibly (or audibly) global. Seismic shifts in the political and economic organization of the world are producing seismic shifts in language use. Problems long recognized by epidemiologists of language decline as afflicting small languages are now increasingly besetting major languages like French, German and Russian as the cultural force of English erodes their position (Tonkin 2003: 324).

The Emergence of English in Georgia

Currently Georgia is witnessing a process of linguistic transition whereby the dominant Russian (universal language in the USSR) is being replaced by English (dominant language in the world). This process in progress is not always very smooth, Russian does not want to relinquish its dominant positions, and language dominance is a good instrument to preserve political influence. However, Russian is no longer a language of prestige in Georgia. The younger generation is no longer interested in learning Russian, but young people have a strong motivation to learn English as a global language. English is the second language taught at school, and its knowledge is almost obligatory to find a job.

Shifts from one second language to another usually cause many problems. As Humphrey Tonkin in the paper "The search for a global linguistic strategy", in which he discusses the cases of linguistic situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union writes:

> It will take years for the young nations to overcome such language deficits, which will require the mobilization of what are often weak educational systems and the planning of the linguistic means for integration into the global economy (Tonkin 2003: 325).

The signs of dominant language shift already occur in Georgian colloquial speech. Monitoring of Georgian speech acts show how non-standard Russian loan words and loan translations (calques) are being replaced by English ones. The younger generation mainly uses English slang, Russian slang that was widely spread in the Georgian language has been almost forgotten. Lots of English loan translations (calques) are found in the language of entertainment. English language influence is reflected even in the intonation of sentences particularly in teenagers' speech. Since recent institutional reforms in Georgia follow the English language models and guidelines, the influence of English is evident in written documentation. The language of media, especially the language of the TV and the Internet also has a strong influence of English, e.g. English morphological and syntactic clichés, calques, etc. The monitoring of Georgian speech

acts as well as written sources reveals that English language calques occur very frequently (e.g. uses of *make+noun* constructions to replace usual verbal forms, *made an arrest* instead of *arrested*, *etc*., frequent uses of the determined in the plural with a plural determinandum like Indo-European languages, *many books*, *two books,* etc, while Georgian uses the determined form in singular in these cases, *bevri tsigni (many book), ori tsigni (two book*)*, etc.* In a long term perspective these types of mistakes may stipulate structural changes in language inventory.

The study of foreign language calques and clichés highlights an important factor: usually language speakers more actively fight against non-standard loans and foreign language clichés from the language of the aggressor than that of others, which is why the language position of Georgian speakers also seems more radical towards Russian language influence (non-standard loans, calques etc.) compared to those of English. It is noteworthy that the term 'barbarism' in Georgian refers mainly to Russian words (Arabuli 2004: 235).

This attitude can be linked to the two ways of looking at the phenomenon of globalization as interconnectedness or as expansion, as it is defined by Humphrey Tonkin (Tonkin 2003: 319). If we look at these two approaches Russian is a language of expansion and English is a language of interconnectedness. However, interconnectedness also brings new challenges. In general, the new challenges Georgia is facing in the process of globalization are almost the same as other languages face in the realm of English dominance. But in addition, the status of Georgian as an official language as mentioned above is very fragile. Meanwhile demographic projections of the population shows a tendency toward a decreasing population as well as an increase in internal and external migrations (labour migration among them). Russian military operations forced approximately 10 percent of the total Georgian population to become refugees. The Civil Registry Agency of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia by 3 September has registered 125,810 internally displaced persons (IDPs) forced to leave their homes by Russian attacks and bombings, which were followed by widespread looting, deliberate destruction of civilian property, harassment of civilian ethnic Georgian populations in South Ossetia, in adjacent regions, and in Upper Abkhazia. The number of IDPs has been increasing due to the ongoing persecution of ethnic Georgians in Russian controlled territories. Added to the approximately 300,000 IDPs resulting from the conflicts of the 1990s the total number of ethnic Georgians expelled from their homes amounts to approx. 10 percent of the total population of Georgia; About 42,000 people in Gali district (Abkhazia, Georgia) and few thousand Georgians in Akhalgori remain under imminent threat of ethnic cleansing (Ministry of Justice 2008: 2). The unstable economic situation forced more than a million people to go abroad to find work. So far most of Georgian immigrants speak Georgian at home. But since we do not have the whole picture and they are new migrants it is too early to make any kind of prognosis.

The main problem is that the Georgian language is an official language in Georgia and that carries the responsibility to protect minority and regional languages (and recently many efforts have been made by the Georgian State to protect them, as the Law of Georgia on Official Language says, 'the state of Georgia protects and strengthens

the centuries-old tradition of coexistence and harmonic development of languages and cultures in the country'), does not completely match the two obvious positive factors for 'a safe language', official state support and very large number of speakers (for the categorization of languages see Krauss 1992: 7). As mentioned above official state support by the law (Article 5) does not always work in practice and the status of the official language is very vulnerable especially on the occupied territories as well as demographics with a declining population. And although linguistic identification as a marker to determine Georgian identity might be one of the self-defense mechanisms acting in favour of the Georgian language that is obviously not enough to overcome the challenges and problems it faces in a globalized world.

Conclusion: An Uncertain Future

In general the question how the languages should survive in the global world where prosperity speaks English still remains open. It is hard to find the best solution but as David Crystal says in the preface of his book:

> We need to take two principles on board if we are to make any progress towards the kind of peaceful and tolerant society... The first principle fosters historical identity and promotes a climate of mutual respect. The second principle fosters cultural opportunity and promotes a climate of international intelligibility (Crystal 2003: xiv).

It is complicated but it is necessary to find a solution to avoid the danger that unifying languages will consequently result in unifying ways of thinking. That is how Claude Hagège, whose position is more radical, presents the threat of a global language. In the interview he mentions that people always try to find easy options: Obviously cross-cultural contacts are very important but the problem is that most of the people who support the idea of foreign language learning usually speak only one language themselves, English, says Hagège. He adds that language is not only a communication tool, it is a way of thinking that reflects a vision of the world and culture, and every idiom that disappears is an invaluable loss (Hagège 2012). The UNESCO document on endangered languages also reminds us of the value of a single language:

> Language diversity is essential to the human heritage. Each and every language embodies the unique cultural wisdom of a people. The loss of any language is thus a loss for all humanity (UNESCO 2003: 1).

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