



ISSUES OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE GEORGIAN DIASPORA OF BAKU (According to the Georgian Émigré Press of the First Half of XX Century)¹

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Abstract. The presented article deals with sociolinguistic and cultural-educational issues of the Georgian diaspora in Baku according to the Georgian emigrant press of the first half of the twentieth century. Georgian-Azerbaijani relations are connected by centuries-old history. Two people who do not share a common language and ethnic origin live in the same region and share the same historical experience. In 1918–1921, Baku and Tbilisi were declared the capitals of independent states. From this period, Azerbaijan and Georgia exchanged diplomatic missions and expressed support for each other. After the Sovietization of Georgia, the political elite was forced to emigrate to Europe. They published Georgian-language newspapers in various European cities for years as part of the struggle for independence. In their publications, an important place was devoted to the issues of language and culture in the Georgian diaspora of Baku.

Keywords: Emigration, Baku, diaspora, Georgian language, culture.

BAKININ GÜRCÜ DİASPORUNDA DİL VƏ MƏDƏNİYYƏT MƏSƏLƏLƏRİ

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Xülasə. Təqdim olunan məqalədə XX əsrin birinci yarısında gürcü mühacirət mətbuatının məlumatına əsasən, Bakıdakı gürcü diasporunun fəaliyyətinin sosial-lingvistik və mədəni-maarif məsələləri araşdırılmışdır. Gürcüstan-Azərbaycan münasibətlərinin çoxəsrlik tarixi vardır. Dili və etnik mənşəyi ortaq olmayan bu iki millət eyni bölgədə yaşayır və eyni tarixi təcrübəni bölüşür. 1918-1921-ci illərdə Bakı və Tiflis müstəqil dövlətlərin paytaxtları elan edildi. Bu dövrdən etibarən Azərbaycan və Gürcüstan diplomatik nümayəndəliklər mübadiləsi aparmış, bir-birinə dəstək göstərmişlər. Gürcüstanın sovetləşməsindən sonra siyasi elita Avropaya mühacirət etməyə məcbur olmuşdur. Müstəqillik mübarizəsi çərçivəsində onlar illər boyu Avropanın müxtəlif şəhərlərində gürcü dilində qəzetlər nəşr edirdilər. Onların nəşrlərində Bakının gürcü diasporunda dil və mədəniyyət məsələlərinə mühüm yer ayrılmışdır. **Açar sözlər:** Mühacirət, Bakı, diaspora, gürcü dili, mədəniyyət.

ПРОБЛЕМЫ ЯЗЫКА И КУЛЬТУРЫ В ГРУЗИНСКОЙ ДИАСПОРЕ БАКУ

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Резюме. В представленной статье рассматриваются социолингвистические и культурно-образовательные вопросы грузинской диаспоры в Баку по материалам грузинской эмиграционной прессы первой половины XX века. Грузино-азербайджанские отношения связаны многовековой историей. Два народа, не имеющие общего языка и этнического происхождения, живут в одном регионе и имеют общий исторический опыт. В 1918-1921 годах Баку и Тбилиси были объявлены столицами независимых государств. С этого периода Азербайджан и Грузия обменивались дипломатическими миссиями и выражали поддержку друг другу. После советизации Грузии политическая элита была вынуждена эмигрировать в Европу. В рамках борьбы за независимость они в течение многих лет издавали газеты на грузинском языке в разных городах Европы. В их публикациях важное место отводилось вопросам языка и культуры грузинской диаспоры Баку.

Ключевые слова: Эмиграция, Баку, диаспора, грузинский язык, культура.

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1. Introduction

If you look at Azerbaijani-Georgian relations from a historical perspective, they are very reminiscent of a relationship that can be called a “community based on a common destiny”. Unrelated by language or ethnicity, these two peoples have lived in the same region for many centuries and share much of the same historical experience. The linguistic and religious differences between them only testify to the extraordinary cultural diversity and richness of the South Caucasus. For two centuries, Azerbaijan and Georgia were part of the Russian Empire and later as union republics of the USSR. In 1918-1921, Baku and Tbilisi were the capitals of independent states.

In fact, the peoples of Georgia and Azerbaijan fought for national autonomy and cultural rights, but it was not until 1918 that they proclaimed their own independent states: the leaders of the national movements in Georgia and Azerbaijan, the social democrats Noe Zhordania and Mammad Amin Rasulzade did not imagine a future in alliance with the Bolsheviks [14, p.113].

May 1918 was an epochal watershed in the history of the peoples of Georgia and Azerbaijan: after centuries of Russian domination, they finally achieved national independence. On 26 May, Georgia proclaimed itself a sovereign state. Azerbaijan followed two days later. Amidst the chaos that reigned in the region in the spring of 1918, these countries rejoiced at the end of Russian domination and the hope for a better future.

Under the Constitution of the Georgian Democratic Republic, Georgian was declared an official language. However, after the invasion of the Red Army and the Sovietisation of Georgia in 1921, the Georgian language was again under pressure from Bolshevik Russia. The government and political parties had no choice but to emigrate. They began active political activities to restore independence and a press of Georgian emigrants began to develop to achieve this goal. The explicitly negative attitude of the Soviet authorities towards the Georgian language and the struggle against it was seen as one of the key themes of the Georgian emigrant press. As a rule, newspapers and journals paid special attention to the issue of language policy in Georgia. In their publications, an important place was devoted to the issues of language and culture in the Georgian diaspora of Baku.

The list of Georgian periodicals issued in Europe in the first half of XX century is quite impressive. There is an incomplete list of the periodicals – the newspapers: “Drosha” (Paris), “Sakartvelo” (Paris), “Kartuli Gazeti” (Berlin), “Akhali Sakartvelo” (Paris-Berlin), “Tetri Giorgi” (Paris-Berlin), “Damoukidebeli Sakartvelo” (Paris), “Mamulishvili” (Paris), “Sakartvelo” (Paris), “Muzaradi” (Paris), “Sakartvelos Gushagi” (Paris); the journals: “Tavisufali Sakartvelo” (Geneva), “Samshoblosatvis” (Paris), “Brdzola” (Paris), “Sakhalkho Sakme” (Paris), “Sakartvelos Moambe” (Berlin), “Tavisufali Sakartvelo” (Istanbul-Paris), “Akhalgazrda SocialDemokrati” (Paris), “Akhali Iveria” (Paris), “Kavkasioni” (Paris), “Mkhedari” (Paris), “Jvari Vazisa” (Paris), “Adamianosani” (Paris), “Samshoblo” (Paris).

2. Methodology

The presented article examines sociolinguistic and cultural-educational issues of the activities of the Georgian diaspora in Baku according to the Georgian emigrant press of the first half of the twentieth century. The research was carried out within the framework of the project “Sociolinguistic Picture of Georgia in the Press of the Georgian Emigrants of the First Half of XX Century” which is carried out with the financial support of the National Science Foundation of Georgia named after Shota Rustaveli.

The article aims to collect relevant empirical material based on the digital corpus of the press of the Georgian emigrants of the 20th century and to answer the following questions through the method of sociolinguistic analysis: 1) What measures had the Georgian diaspora in Baku taken to preserve the Georgian language? 2) To what extent was Baku ready to accept the Georgian language in all areas of cultural life?

The results of the research conducted within the framework of this article will enable researchers to learn about the issue of native language and culture in the Georgian diaspora in Baku as revealed in the press of Georgian emigrants.

3. Issues of georgian language in the Georgian diaspora of Baku

Since the second half of the 19th century, there has been a mass migration of Georgians to different cities of Azerbaijan. In the 19th century, due to the development of the oil industry on the Absheron Peninsula, Baku became the most powerful industrial center of Transcaucasia. By 1904, the number of Georgians living in Baku was about 4,000 people. They settled compactly in one area and the majority of them were workers. Georgians worked in Baku in various institutions [8, p.10].

In 1985, Mamed Gulmamedov [3, p.54], an Azerbaijani researcher working in Georgia, published a very interesting monograph on the life and activities of Georgians in Azerbaijan entitled “Society for Spreading Literacy Among Georgians and Georgians of Azerbaijan”. Based on published materials and archival documents, the work examines issues related to the activities of Georgian schools in Azerbaijan in the last century, as well as the large cultural and educational activities carried out by Georgians who worked in Baku, Saingilo and Ganja. The preservation of the national identity of Georgians living in these regions is presented in a reasoned form.

“Baku, with its 120 thousand population, is a fairly large city located on a bumpy area. Here life boils and shimmers, the city never sleeps; Baku does not lag behind European cities in its internal affairs, industry and trade... What are Georgians doing here, whose number today is over 5,000 and growing every day? What benefit do they bring to their nation, their homeland?” [5].

The quote is taken from a local Georgian journal article, “The Kingdom of Oil”, which was published in separate letters in several issues of the journal “Klde” in 1912. The author tells the reader in detail about the capital of the neighboring country and the Georgians who

lived here at that time. It should be noted that the topic of Baku was not alien to emigration periodicals. Especially since the 80s of the 19th century, when the capital of Azerbaijan became one of the largest industrial centers in the Caucasus and a major employer for job seekers. This circumstance has turned it into the most multi-ethnic and multicultural city in the region [15, p.185].

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Georgian emigrant press paid special attention to the problem of the functioning of the native language in the Caucasus, which fought against the Russification policy of tsarism. The newspaper “Sakartvelo” publishes the following under the heading “Chronicle of the Georgian Chronicle”:

“The trustee of the Caucasian educational district understands perfectly well that Caucasians do not speak Russian and that an increase in the number of Russian schools does not mean the spread of education. In this case, the government's intentions are quite clear: Georgian and Azerbaijani schools will be converted into Russian schools. This means that the central government needs to destroy the identity of small nations” [10].

Here is what the Georgian emigrant newspaper “Sakartvelo” writes about the Caucasus, published in Paris in 1904:

“Today the Caucasus represents great integrity and unity, although there are national and linguistic differences. The autonomy of Georgia, like the autonomy of other parts such as Ganja, Baku, is the first political step towards the establishment of a federalist structure, since federalism is a form of unification of peoples that gives freedom to every nation” [9].

In Baku, Georgians were integrated with other peoples, this created the danger of losing their native language. Representatives of the Georgian intelligentsia in Baku understood this well and looked for a way out of this situation. It was on the basis of these changes that the idea of opening the Baku branch of a cultural and educational organization popular at that time in Georgia - Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians - appeared. Georgian migrants appealed to the management of the society for permission to open a Baku branch. The first official record of this case is dated September 5, 1908 [2, p.14].

At the end of 1908, Georgians living in Baku actively started talking about opening a Baku branch of a cultural and educational organisation popular at that time in Georgia - the Society for Literacy among Georgians. The first official record of this case is dated 5th September 1908. Razhden Natsvlishvili, a Georgian from Baku, writes: “Here, in Baku itself, as well as in its neighbourhood, in the near future they want to open a Sunday school on behalf of the Russian-Georgian Literacy Society and we ask you to inform us within a week whether the board will be able to open a Sunday school of the above-mentioned type here. The board does not ask for any material assistance, except for care” [1].

On May 3, 1909, the first public meeting of the Baku branch of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians was held, where an action plan was presented [15, pp.186-187]. The plan was as follows:

“1) open a Georgian school, because the board was confident that the Georgian school would become a binding force for the Georgian diaspora and would help Baku Georgians raise their children in their native soil and bring them closer to the Georgian nation; 2) establish a free library; 3) open a Sunday school and organize public readings; 4) conduct lectures on Georgian history and literature, since Georgian youth studied in Baku schools at that time and could not study their native language and history. On October 4, 1909, the first Georgian primary school opened in Baku. The main subject was the Georgian language. According to the Society's records, at that time there were 45 children studying at the school, the number of applicants was growing all the time, but the small size of the school building prevented the satisfaction of their desires” [1].

According to the Georgian newspaper “Imereti”, under the heading “Letters from Baku” it is said: *“The Georgian school in Baku stands in one of the most prominent places in the city and carries out a great mission. Georgian children here speak their native and foreign languages and the purpose of this schools - to give our children basic knowledge, education and development of intelligence and most importantly, to show them a love for their native language” [4].*

The importance of the native Georgian language is discussed in the newspaper article “Evening of Yakob Gogebashvili at the Georgian School of Baku”. Gogebashvili, a Georgian teacher, publicist and children's writer, is known for his masterfully compiled primer for children “Deda Ena” (“Mother Tongue”), which, in an updated form, is still a teaching aid in Georgian schools to this day. Someone under the pseudonym writes about him in the newspaper:

“I attended the evening of our great teacher Yakob Gogebashvili at a Georgian school in Baku and experienced great pleasure and spiritual satisfaction. The school director described the life and work of Gogebashvili, where he emphasized the importance of the native language in private and especially public schools” [4].

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that there was a Georgian church in Baku, which is indisputable proof of the tolerance of Azerbaijani society.

“The people of Baku celebrated St. Nino’s Day. On this day, local Georgians were able to pray in their native language for the first time. Here three Georgian priests performed a service in the Fleet Church. A Georgian choir sang for this day. The services were performed in Georgian. Priest Kandelaki gave a wonderful speech. The service was attended by students of the Georgian school and a large number of Georgians” [13].

4. Cultural and educational activities of the Georgian diaspora in Baku

Baku Georgians had their own press in their native language. On January 14, 1910, the weekly newspaper “Martsvali” (“Grain”) was published, with a literary, political and scientific-historical direction. Since January 1, 1913, the weekly Georgian literary and political journal “Tskaro” has been published, but since March 1913 the magazine has been renamed “Chveni

Tskaro". This magazine published articles by N. Zhordania and other prominent figures concerning the national issue [8, p.17].

The Sakartvelo newspaper publishes information about the leader of the revolutionary movement in tsarist Russia, social democrat Lado Ketskhoveli, which says the following:

"Ketskhoveli moved to Baku under a different name. For the first time he began to create social democratic circles. Armenian nationalist revolutionaries began to persecute him. In 1901, Ketskhoveli founded the secret printing house "Nina" and published the first Georgian illegal newspaper "Brdzola", which has not stopped to this day" [11].

The journal "Le Caucase" dedicates an article to Joseph Dadiani, who was one of the leaders of the Georgian community of Baku, a member of the Baku and Tbilisi branches of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians. In 1917 he participated in the founding of the National Democratic Party of Georgia. The journal "Le Caucase" published in Paris wrote about him:

"In his specialty, Joseph Dadiani spent most of his life in the very heart of the oil kingdom - the city of Baku - the fraternal capital of Azerbaijan, where life was truly in full swing. It was here that our compatriot nobleman Dadiani was the first candidate in the local city government elections. He enjoyed great authority among city leaders and compatriots" [7].

To help economically needy compatriots, the Georgian intelligentsia organized charity evenings every year, which, in addition to the Georgian diaspora, were attended by representatives of other nationalities. The newspaper "Sakhalkho Gazeti" writes about this year 1914:

"In Baku, Georgian evenings have become a tradition. It's been 23 years since these evenings have been held, so in two years the people of Baku will organize an anniversary evening. The local Georgians and Azerbaijanis love these meetings. Each family considers it its duty to attend them and contribute to the common cause" [12].

Since the early 80s of the 19th century, a theater troupe has been gradually formed in Baku, most of which were non-professionals. In the 90s, they were joined by a small group of professional actors and at the beginning of the 20th century, the theater troupe turned into the Georgian Theater, which carried out significant charitable work: *"In 1904, play "Brother and Sister" was staged. The performance was sold out and the performance was a big moneymaker"* [6, p.37].

The activities of the Baku circle of Georgian women were very multifaceted and fruitful. Members of the society collected donations from wealthy Georgians and distributed them to those in need and organized theatrical performances. In 1913, they opened a vocational school for young girls, where students were taught knitting, embroidery, cutting and sewing and other useful things. Among the defenders of Georgian culture were not only Georgians, but also most of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia. Known for her charity, Liza-Khanum Mukhtarova and her husband, a major Baku oil industrialist and philanthropist Murtuza Mukhtarov, treated

everything Georgian with great love. In 1904, they donated 500 rubles to the Baku Georgian School. In 1914, on the initiative of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians, a special committee was founded at the Baku branch of the society, the amount of 2,000 rubles collected by it was sent to needy Adjarians.

In the 1918-1920s, due to the unfavorable development of political processes in Azerbaijan, most of the Georgians living in Baku left the city. One part emigrated to other countries, the other returned to their homeland.

It is worth noting the fact that from Baku there were many public figures of our country, famous in various arenas, such as: conductor Evgeniy Mikeladze, a native of Baku, the first female director Nino Gamrekeli-Toreli, who began her directorial career in Baku, Georgian world ballerina Vera Tsignadze, opera singer Vano Sarajishvili, film director Vasily Amashukeli, one of the first figures in Georgian cinema. He made several films in Baku about the production of Baku oil: “Transportation of Coal”, “Work at Oil Pumps” and “Oil Extraction” [6, p.38].

Conclusion. Thus, one interesting circumstance should be noted that emerged during our research: in the Georgian local and emigrant press of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the topic of Baku, as a political, also purely cultural and informational nature, was always published in separate publications in newspapers and magazines, as well as in such sections as, for example, “Letters from Baku”. The topic of Baku never appears in the foreign news section. This circumstance gives us the opportunity to say that the Caucasus and in particular Azerbaijan were not perceived as foreign countries in the minds of Georgian society [15, p.188], moreover, materials published in the emigrant and local press indicate that thanks to the support of the Azerbaijani society, the Georgian diaspora in Baku managed to preserve their native language, religion, culture and national identity.

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