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Taoan Dialect of Georgian Language and Linguistic Space of Collective Memory in the Chorokhi Basin

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ABSTRACT

In one of the provinces of historical South Georgia, on the modern Turkish territory, in Tao, intensive assimilation and large-scale migration processes resulted in a decrease of the Georgian-speaking space to a minimum and in the 21st century only a few Georgian speaking villages remained. The aim of the work “Taoan Dialect of Georgian Language and linguistic space of collective memory in the Chorokhi Basin” is to study the linguistic panorama in the narratives of the locals, based on the ethnological and dialectical materials gathered by the authors in the Parkhlistskali valley expeditions. Besides this, the results of the research also reflect the structure of the Georgian settlements and some of the self-awareness issues that are presented in collective memory of the local population. Georgian villages are in the basin (Parkhlistskali) of the left tributary of the middle wing of the river Chorokhi. The authors point to the specifics of Khevay, Kobay and Balkhi Georgians: it is not argued that one dialect is spoken within the mentioned villages, but at the same time the local population distinguishes certain peculiarities of the inhabitants of some small gorges. In this regard, the work is of significant novelty, especially if one of its foundations is completely new material gathered in the fields of expeditions in the villages and districts of the study area, which are introduced into scientific circulation for the first time.

Keywords: Chorokhi Basin, Endangered Dialect, Georgian Dialects, Lingvoculturology, Narrative, Taoan Dialect. This is an open access article under [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

The river Chorokhi basin is the main area for the spread of southern dialects of Georgian language. Namely, in the region the widespread dialects are Taoan, Klarjetian, Shavshetian and Adjarian.

The history of the mentioned region is very painful: The Chorokhi Basin has been the habitat of Georgian tribes since ancient times. For centuries, this area, together with neighboring regions, has been the part of the cohabitation of many nations and the battlefield of the fierce conflicts. Indigenous population was confronted with Persia, Byzantine, Arabia, Ottomans and Russia. As a result, “the right of one people to another was changed over times, faith was changed, language, education, life order

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and self-awareness...” (Takhaishvili, 1991: 197). The centuries-old process of interaction of cultures paints a unique picture of the 21st century in the Chorokhi basin and produces a fertile field for cultural studies.

The possibilities for the study of the region were limited to twentieth century. The interest of Georgian and foreign scientists towards the Chorokhi basin and cultural and linguistic diversity has been especially strong since the end of the twentieth century, after the collapse of the Soviet Union (we mean the works of the last period, including complex monographs (Shavsheti, 2011; Klarjeti, 2016), which gives more importance to our study of the basic idea of originality. Moreover, in this regard, no one has ever studied this issue as a subject of special research.

The composition of the work is planned so that it can be done with wide and multilateral analysis of the problem. Namely, in the first paragraph, geography of the Georgian-language settlements of the Parkhlistskali Gorge (Turkish Republic, Yusufel District) is discussed. Here is presented the structure of these settlements based on field materials visualized with the maps (author: M. Chokharadze, 2018). The second paragraph analyzes the narratives of the local population directly related to their speech.

Consequently, within the limits of culturological and lingvoculturological studies, the present work reflects the views expressed in the collective memory of the local population, on the one hand, about the connection of Taoan dialect with other Georgian dialects and about the peculiarities within Taoan dialect, on the other hand. In this regard, the work is of significant novelty, especially if one of its foundations is completely new material gathered in the fields of expeditions in the villages and districts of the study area, which are introduced into scientific circulation for the first time. Finally, conclusions are summarized in the results of the survey.

Besides the fact that the work is thought-provoking for researchers interested in the study of the Georgian speech of the population of the region (Taoan Dialect), the work is important material, in general, for cultural studies, collective memory and for observing different essential layers of self-awareness.

2. Methodology

The complex structure of the present work implies the interdisciplinary methodology of research and innovative approaches to its logical contents. First of all, we mean the methods of empirical research, as well as the methods of empirical research and analyzes of discourse, which basically relies on the achievements and theoretical basis of contemporary scientists. It is noteworthy that in the last ten years (specifically, 2009, 2010, 2016, 2017) in the Parkhlistskhali Gorge and, in general, Tao), a large volume of field work has been conducted, which in itself stipulates the multidimensionality of the methodology and certain novelties. The oral text in the work is recorded at the time of the above-mentioned expedition, more than one hundred respondents were interviewed, and from the citation of the text used in the work, we will indicate the identity of the teller, the place of residence and the time. These materials are based on mapping as well.

3. Chorokhi basin and Georgian-speaking settlements of Parkhlistskhali Gorge

Most of the Chorokhi Basin is part of the Republic of Turkey. In the Georgian settlements on the territories of the Chorokhi Basin (in the historic south of Georgia) as well as in the internal provinces (in the villages of the descendants of the Muhajirs exiled from Georgia as a result of Russian-Ottoman wars in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) the Georgian language is in danger of imminent disappearance: in the Georgian settlements only senior and more or less average-age generation speak native language. The new generation does not speak Georgian language; consequently, there is a danger of disappearing Taoan dialect.

Unlike the descendants of Muhajirs, the Georgians from Chorokhi Basin villages are native inhabitants. As for Tao, the historical province in the middle of the Chorokhi Basin, intensive assimilation, unsystematic or deliberate migration processes resulted in the decrease of the Georgian language space in the 21st century and Georgian language is only spoken in a few villages of such a huge territory. The Taoan dialect survived in these villages is unique because it had no contact with literary Georgian language for centuries. Because of its geographical location, there was less contact with

other contemporary dialects. Accordingly, it keeps the ancient components of the Georgian language, is distinguished with many peculiarities and is the subject of particular importance for linguists. Due to the specificity of the relations of the Soviet Union and Turkey and the strict border regime, Georgian researchers were able to work on the territory of Turkey only after the end of the 20th century (after the collapse of the Soviet Union). The reality of the 21st century is that the average population of these villages is the last generation who speaks the Taoan Dialect.

The Georgian-speaking villages (Khevay, Kobay, Balkhi) are in the Parkhali Basin (Parkhlistskhali) of the left tributary of the middle of the river Chorokhi. Parkhali is known in historical sources as one of the districts of the historic province of Tao. Despite the cliffy relief, Parkhali is still intensely populated today. It consists of 18 administrative units. Old Georgian names are no longer observed in official geographical nomenclature. In the 20th century, especially since the 1920s, tens of thousands of settlements all over Turkey were given new names. Naturally, these changes have affected the Chorokhi Basin – villages and separate areas. The map (№ 1) represents the villages of the Parkhali Basin within the modern geographical nomenclature with historical (Georgian) names. (The old Georgian names of the Parkhali Gorge villages are given with Georgian and Latin letters on the map, without parentheses; and the current (Turkish) names of the same settlements are given in the parentheses).

On the map the bold “Islands” mark the Georgian-language space that still remains in the Parkhali Basin. Three small islands are marked on the bottom of Parkhali, in Vaniskhevi. Most of the Georgian population of these areas is resettled from Kobay. They live in three districts of Vaniskhevi: Makhateti, Pikaltavi and Chilati. Consequently, these areas are “plain” for the Kobayans. This is the reason that in the narratives of some of the respondents the nominated regions are Kobay Meheles (districts).

In the east, across the Parkhali Basin, there is one more Georgian-speaking “island” - village Binati, where only the middle and the older generations speak the Taoan Dialect.

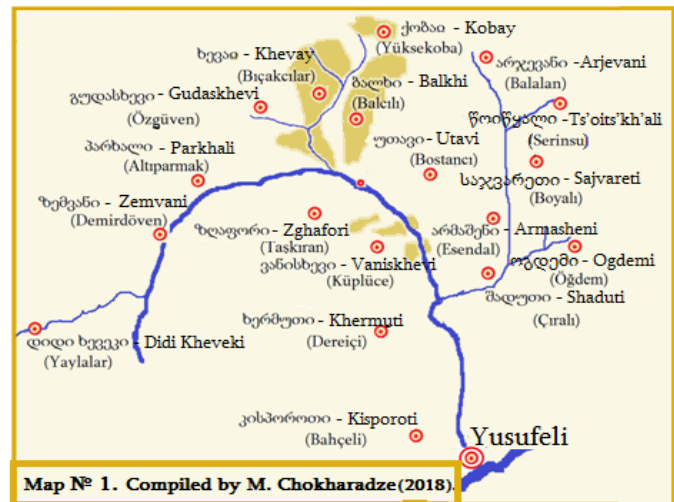
The river of Georgian-speaking gorge is made up of many streams that flow from the slopes, which gather in small valleys and gradually unite as one of the large and rapid mountain rivers.

The gorge, in which Georgian-speaking settlements are located, attracted public attention only in the 1970s, after Giorgi Kazbegi travelled to this region (1874) and described it.

There is no traditionally established, common name for the Georgian-speaking gorge for the local population. Perhaps this is the reason why modern researchers call the gorge in different ways. In the scientific works of the last period we often find “Kobayskhevi”, “Khevays Khevi”, “Eliaskhevi Gorge”. We use the last geographical name - “Eliaskhevi Gorge” to mark the Georgian-speaking gorge (in the Turkish literature the river is called “Bıçakçılar deresi” or “Hevek deresi”. On some maps, there are names of the gorges above the middle part of the Basin, such as Sadikhan (Sadgikhana), Gudashv (Gudaskhevi) and others.) (Pagava, 2013: 278). In addition to the fact that in this part the population refers to the river as “Eliaskhevistskhali”, it should also be mentioned that the waters from above Eliaskhevi settlement have already been gathered in one bed and the river formation is complete.

The settlement structure of the region is similar to the traditional theme. For instance, Khevay is a combination of numerous settlements;

According to the locals, it consists of four large Meheles (districts) that are located in the gorge in the following order: 1. Eliaskhevi; 2. Devsekaray (//Deviskaray - Sometimes instead of Devsekaray they say Khevay (Khevay Merkez // center); 3. Pishnarkhevi; 4. Ieti. These Meheles, in turn, have minor Districts, Mezres and Yailas. This combination of settlements creates an administrative unit whose official Turkish name is Bıçakçılar. It has a status of the village (Köy) and has a Muhtar. According to the



data of 2000 year, the population is 720 people. (Statistical data is quoted from Turkish Wikipedia: https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/B%C4%B1%C3%A7ak%C4%B1lar,_Yusufeli).

Balkhi has fewer administrative units; it has a small number of residents as – according to the data of 2000 year - 191 people; the situation is somewhat different in Kobay (population - 262 people): the rural areas are basically closely interconnected and practically located within one settlement. Kobay districts are: Gaghmai (the same as güney - south), the Gamoghmay (the same as kuzey - north), Zoomahale (// Zomomahale), Nabiani and Aniani. At the same time, as mentioned above, Kobay residents live in some of the districts of Vaniskhevi, but Vaniskhevi has become the plain for Kobayans relatively late.

It is difficult to determine dynamics and chronology of migrations, but according to Ali Yazici from Makhateti (01.07.2017), his ancestors lived here 200 years ago. Most of Makhateti's population (about 40 families) has been settled from Kobay. Nowadays, due to intensive migration, there are several families remained in the village.

On the map (No. 2), the abovementioned villages their relatively large districts are presented.

As for Gudaskhevi located in the same sector, the Georgian-speaking population is no longer living there.

In the areas of interest to us, the process of collapsing traditional farming is evident, which has significantly accelerated by the intensified migration especially in recent years. As far as possible, residents of neighboring towns keep in touch with the village, and the part of the exiles in Turkey's inland provinces still manage to visit the village in the summer, only to relax, and the rest of them is finally cut off the base. Naturally, all this, along with other factors, affects the linguistic situation in many ways.

A century ago, in whole Tao, and consequently in the Parkhali Basin, the Georgian-speaking space was much more extensive. Based on the materials of the expedition of 1917 among the Georgian-speaking villages, Ekvtime Takhaishvili mentions Parkhali (Takhaishvili, 1960: 83), Armenkhevi, Gudaskhevi, Utavi, Vaniskhevi, except for the above mentioned three settlements (Takhaishvili, 1991: 223).

The collective memory of the 21st century still keeps the memory of more extensive range of Georgian language. Oral stories related to older generations are not homogeneous, but it is quite scarce, sometimes contradictory, but they obviously (though fragmented) provide information on Georgian population and the ancient Christian culture.

4. Taoan dialect in the narratives of indigenous population

The fact is that in recent times the study of memory has become one of the most important directions of interdisciplinary research. In this specific case when we speak of the linguistic narratives, it is clear that we are dealing with the stories in the memories of several generations. Therefore, we should remember the “external factors” or the fact that the content of the history stored in the memory is determined by the fact or event the narrative is based on, but also - a) ideological, cultural and material context of the fact or event; b) historical literature and sources related to the topic and the quality of the narrator's access to them; c) the listener, the environment where the story is told; d) the purpose for which they are telling the story. It should not be controversial if we say that the power and content of these external factors are sometimes substantially diverse for different generations. At the same time, as M. Halbwachs notes that people perceive, understand and remember the facts and events that are defined by the social group they belong to (Halbwachs, 1992: 43).



Including oral histories, in “Schematic Narrative Pattern” means observing a general narrative model. In this model the dominant sealed in the collective memory will be definitely exposed, which is the basis of the conceptual image of the collective memory. The researcher is obliged to create a balance from narratives and try to draw a unified picture of collective memory.

The thematic range of memory is indefinable, but this time we are just focusing on the thematic arc related to the linguistic situation. The narratives gathered in the Parkhali Basin settlement can be systemized in some respects. In this case, we single out three groups, which include:

- a) The information in which, despite the presence of visible markers, the old Georgian reality is neglected.
- b) Specific information on the Georgian toponyms in the settlement, when the memory of the Georgian-speaking generation is lost;
- c) Specific information about the Georgian-speaking generation in the neighboring (non-Georgian) village; this memory is deteriorated in many places, but some kind of inertia is felt everywhere.

What is the Taoan dialect that has miraculously reached the 21st century?

If we go back to the history of the issue, it should be noted that Giorgi Kazbegi drew his special attention to the uniqueness of the Taoans’ speech (Taoan Dialect). He says that “with their exceptional accent and quick speech, the speech of the inhabitants of Tao is unique; it does not resemble any point of speech in Georgia”. Kazbegi does not say anything about the differences within individual settlements, but he points out one of the essential factors that contribute to the abovementioned peculiarities. He notes that “the strict nature and the complete reticence have a special effect on the [locals’] morality”. According to him, “next to Kobak, in the Parkhali Gorge, the traveler is witnessing an absolutely different picture. People here are more developed because the hindering conditions of nature are little to be in touch with the population of Chorokhi Basin” (Kazbegi, 2015:142). This “hindering conditions of nature” and, therefore, “complete reticence” has led to isolation of the settlements and preserving of the native language and Georgian identity on the one hand, and on the other hand, the formation of features within the dialect. In any case, our respondents have repeatedly referred to the above factor: it is not questionable that the speakers of the mentioned villages belong to the framework of one dialect but at the same time it is distinguished by the peculiarities of the certain inhabitants of the small settlements, villages or small gorges.

These peculiarities of the Taoan dialect were mentioned by the Georgian linguists from the very beginning (Putkaradze 1993: 168; Artvinli, 2000: 38; Gujejiani, Putkaradze, 2009: 77; Pagava, 2013, 287). But no less interesting is the linguistic panorama depicted in the narratives of the locals.

When we talk about the oral histories related to dialectical speech, we mean primarily the subjective views of local inhabitants and it should be noted that the Taoans’ observations refer to the differences among the Georgian dialects (southern dialects) of Chorokhi Basin on the one hand and on the other hand - the observations within the Taoan Dialect.

It is noteworthy that Georgians of the Eliaskhevi valley are quite well aware of the difference between Taoan and other Georgian dialects. In the conversation with us (28.07.2010) Mustafa Kantoroglu (village Khevay, district of Konakbaş) compared the speech of Georgians residing in Georgia to the Georgian language of the people living in Borchkha and Machakhela on the one hand, and Taoan dialect - on the other hand. According to his observation, the speech of the Borchkha and Machakhela is close to literary Georgian, so in this case there is no problem of understanding at all. While the Georgians of Khevay, Kobay or Balkhi speak little differently, which does not exclude the relationship with Georgians in another region, but it is somewhat complicated. Meral Kibar, the lady from the same village, also points out the difference: “*chveni gurji skhvaya, tkveni gurji – skhva*” // *Our Georgian is different from your Georgian*).

Indeed, Taoan pronunciation is different from other “Chorokhian” expressions. It is necessary to have some experience to understand the text. The scale of the difference is not so large that they cannot understand each other, but in general those who have more contacts with other Georgians (it is not meant to communicate with tourists only, Georgian electronic media or traveling to Georgia, the Parkhali Gorge is no longer closed, the world cut off region; Migration, good roads, etc. today provide

the possibility of more communication with Georgians in other regions of Turkey), the communication is easier for them. The above-mentioned fact was indicated by our abovementioned respondent:

“*akhla abl-abli devechuet, akhla ts’eelit-mevelit da...abli-abli vitsit, tvara ver vkhtebodit tkveni kartuli da chveni kartuli*” // now we are used to speaking Georgian due to moving to and from, earlier we could not understand your language...).

This “*ts’eelit-mevelit*” is an important factor. During moving to and from we got used to understanding other dialects as well, but in their speech, we can distinguish two layers: one layer appears with a stranger, say, the one from Georgia, or during communication with Shavshetian or Klarjetian person; the second one - while talking to a fellow villager. We cannot say that there is a radical difference between these layers, but in the first case the respondent is cautious, trying to expressly “falsify” the dialect, in the second case – he speaks naturally. Those who have rare relationship with “other” Georgians, they are less, or not at all trying to be “cautious”.

As for the Georgian language of Eliaskhevi valley, the difference among the settlements of the valley is visible and this difference, as noted above, is indicated by the locals as well. According to them, the difference is revealed not only in vocabulary, phonetics, etc. but also in the intonation. It is not controversial that there are significant differences among the dialects, as well as among the linguistic varieties and sayings about the elements of the pronunciation. We have highly accentual and intonational peculiarities on a very small Georgian-speaking territory of the valley, which is naturally the subject of special linguistic studies, but we, in this case, aim only to present the views of local residents.

The primary characteristic of oral history is that the respondents think that there is a difference between the internal valleys but not radical. Above mentioned Mustafa Kantoroglu embodies several settlements, but he also indicates that the speech of the inhabitants is slightly different from each other:

“*Kobaysi, Khevaysi, Pishnarkheis, Devsakaraysisatc skhva soys khvar[atoben]... ikats tote-tote ar ets’kh’oba*”.

As we can see, there are four inner valleys: Kobay, Khevey, Pishnarkhevi, Devsekara. In other cases, Ieti and Balkhi were also named.

Mevlud Bakmazi’s (Dolenjshvili) observation (29.07.2010) living in the village of Khevey describes the situation in detail. He distinguishes some of the components of speech and pays special attention to the intonation; in particular, he concentrates on the relatively sharp expression of the tone in Kobayans’ speech (note that during the description of the situation Mevlud very skillfully imitated the neighboring villagers’ pronunciation):

“*Khevey skhva laparikobs, Kobay skhva, balkhi skhva ena laparikoben. Ena aini, kartulia. Is skhva soy, es skhva soy*”... // Khevayans and Kobayans speak differently. Their language is same but still different).

“- we, Khevayans say: *had khara?*

Kobayans say – *sad khara?*

- we: *had midikhar?*

they: *sad midi’khar?*

-vin *khartant?* – we say;

they – vin *khartant?* –

-we say – *had mikhval?*

They say – *sad mi’khval?*”...

Approximately the same type of difference is indicated by Khevayan (from the Devsekara district) Rejeb Kechiji (30.07.2017), but this time Balkhi is added to comparable objects:

“*chven vitkhvit – remezan, had mikhval? Kvabeli itkhvian: remezan, sad miikhval? Balkheli itkhvian: sad mikhval ch’o da?*”.

Meril Kibar also points to an intonational difference:

“*Kobaelni: ra ijebi gnooo? Kai khara? – ise itkhvian kobaelni; gaagdzeleben...chven ar vagdzelebt*”.

The same respondent pointed to the lexical difference:

“*kobaebi “gno” amboben, chven “no” vambobt... kobaebi “gno” amboben: ra ijebi gno’vo?*”

Khusein Ajar also indicated a variation of the vocabulary (Eliaskhevi - 28.07.2017): "chven jimch'ar vetkhvit imasa, pishnarkhevshi - suskhay etkhv'ian".

Sometimes the emphasis on speech is used by respondents to describe neighbors. For instance, same Mevlud Bakmazi says that the Kobayans do not politely say the words:

"is Kobay, itkh'vis ki - sad khar...shena, sadavri khar? Shents khevavri kharā tu'/? - shen nekhvian'...-ise itkhvis...-shen ghorishvilo'..."

"chven is ear vitkh'vit, ise kai ar ikneba. Nekhviani ikneba!?"

"dampaal! - sad mikhval, dampal'/? - chven tsevekh'avghebit imat [amis gamo]" ...

Thus, neighborly, kind competition is also felt in the evaluation of the speech. This assessment is sometimes subjective, sometimes even the preference of the neighborly village is frankly acknowledged, for example, one of our respondents from Balkhi (29.07.2017) said about the Khevyans:

"isini dāha kai itsian gurjiā, chven - ara. [ik] orjinalia, ak - bevri ara" // they speak better Georgian than we do. Their language is original and ours is not).

5. Conclusions

If we sum up the narratives of the Georgians of Eliaskhevi Valley related to the discussion topic, their views and conclusions can be summarized as following:

- I. Klarjetian and Shavshetian dialects are closer to literary Georgian than Taoan;
- II. The distance and distinction of the Taoan dialect with literary Georgian and other dialects is clear, but this difference is not so large that the speakers on these dialects would not be able to communicate with each other in their own language;
- III. Along with the geographical environment one of the essential reasons for this difference is that Taoan dialect stores older layers than other dialects, so it is "more Georgian" than any other dialects.
- IV. The speech of the inhabitants of the Eliaskhevi valley is different from each other (with vocabulary, phonetics, and intonation). This difference is noticeable but not large-scale.
- V. The Parkhali Basin was previously Georgian in the past. There is still a live memory about the generations of neighboring gorges speaking Georgian; there is no information about the relations of the Georgian-speaking generations from neighboring gorges with the Georgians of the Eliaskhevi valley.

In most cases, Tao's Georgian population can speak about the peculiarities of the dialect. Obviously, we can judge about the degree of how the objective reality is reflected by the observation of Southern Georgians on the speeches of their own or neighboring villages. In the current stage of linguistic studies, it is possible to answer that question, but we must admit that such narratives are interesting not only for linguists: they are important material for cultural studies, collective memory, in general and for observing numerous layers of the self-awareness.

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