

Irine Chachanidze

Political Priorities in the Composition of Linguistic Landscapes in Post-Soviet Georgia

Linguistic landscape, as the range of languages apparent, in textual form, in the surroundings, that is, the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings, and its composition can present specific salient markers of a language situation in a state or a territory and/or of existing priorities in it.

In the Soviet period, there was a specific hierarchy of languages based on their prestige, socio-economic and legal statuses. Judging from the above said, ethnic minorities, inhabiting Georgia, preferred Russian to Georgian.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russian enjoyed no legal status in Georgia. The share of Georgian has increased in linguistic landscape, and English has also appeared owing to the globalization process.

However, Russian has not disappeared in the linguistic landscape of Georgia; its occurrence has been due to the foreign (Russian) military presence in some parts of the country. After their withdrawal from Adjara and Javakheti, its share has decreased in the respective regions. The said factor (foreign military presence) has been particularly salient in Abkhazia and so called South Ossetia, having been occupied by Russia; in the said regions, the priority of Russian is illustrative not only at the expense of Georgian (as officially declared by them), but also of Abkhazian and Ossetic.

Therefore, linguistic landscape serves as salient, material evidence of the actual language situation and political and linguistic priorities in respective regions.