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To the Question of Sociolinguistic Status of the Kartvelian Languages

Georgia is characterized with linguistic diversity, along with ethnic diversity. Some scholars do not separate ethnic and linguistic minorities (in Georgia ethnic identity was often marked by religious indicator as well: for example, Catholic Georgians were called “French”; Muslim Georgians were known as “Tatars”; Muslim Georgians exiled from South Georgia to middle Asia are referred to as “Turk-Meskhians” even today). According to one of the point of view one and the same person may have different national and ethnic identities (the term “nation” implies its modern understanding). According to this point of view, ethnic identity, along with other factors, is based on ethnic language. And national identity, along with other factors as well, is based on national state language. This approach, to some extent, is acceptable. However we do not consider one sided relating of language component to ethnic identification to be right: do the concepts of ethnic and linguistic minorities fully cover each other? Different ideas may be expressed in this regard, especially considering the fact that in Georgia there have not been any researches in this direction yet.

National self-identification is of great importance from the viewpoint of identifying of oneself or certain homogeneous group to this or that ethnic /national/ linguistic group. In 2006-2008 within the framework of the project “Linguistic Situation in Modern Georgia” we tried to determine the question of self-identification of speakers of Kartvelian languages (Megrelian-Laz and Svan) in Georgia and the role of the language component in this identification. As it was seen, their self-identification has no connection with Megrelian-Laz or Svan languages.

It is worth noting that there have been debates on the status of these languages in the past and present; In the aspect of synchronous sociolinguistics, language development and the problem of its historical differentiation is not topical; However, the question of a relation of related and unrelated languages to the state language shows a considerable difference. Undoubtedly, the attitude of Zan-Svan speakers to the use and functioning of the state language is principally different, for example, from that of Azerbaijanis of compactly settled Georgia. This must be reasoned by historical relation of these languages.

The question of a relation of a literary language with a colloquial one must be raised as well: it is accepted that a literary language (representing a subcode of a common national language) comprises two subcodes: code language (used in literary and bookish spheres) and a colloquial one, used in daily interrelation. Svans and Megrelians, as a rule, in all cases have a colloquial subcode, but part of them (their number gradually reduces) with no secondary and higher education, cannot have a literary subcode. In this regard, the situation is the same in the Georgian dialects. These relations are referred to as **diglossy** in sociolinguistics. The sociolinguistic status of ethnic minorities (Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Ossetians...) is different: they belong to linguistic minorities as well and the relation of their languages to state ones is characterised as a **bilingualism**.