

**SCTMG 2020****International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the  
Context of Modern Globalism»****INTERACTION OF RUSSIAN AND OSSETIAN LANGUAGES:  
BILINGUALISM OR ASSIMILATION**

Dzakhova Veronika Tambievn (a)\*, Bizikoeva Lana Sergeevna (b), Kaitukova Svetlana  
Ilinichna (c), Gadzhieva Zamira Tsaraevna (d), Chaiko Natalya Nikolaevna (e)

\*Corresponding author

(a) North Ossetian State University named after K.L. Khetagurov, 44-46 Vatutin st., Vladikavkaz, Russia, tambi69@mail.ru

(b) North Ossetian State University named after K.L. Khetagurov, 44-46 Vatutin st., Vladikavkaz, Russia,  
tmz.b@rambler.ru

(c) North Ossetian State University named after K.L. Khetagurov, 44-46 Vatutin st., Vladikavkaz, Russia,  
svetllanakaitukova@mail.ru

(d) North Ossetian State University named after K.L. Khetagurov, 44-46 Vatutin st., Vladikavkaz, Russia,  
zinazamira@yandex.ru

(e) North Ossetian State University named after K.L. Khetagurov, 44-46 Vatutin st., Vladikavkaz, Russia,  
n.tchaiko@yandex.ru

***Abstract***

Currently, languages cannot exist in isolation, without interacting with other languages. Almost half of the world population is bilingual, i.e. they are native speakers of at least two languages. Interaction of languages results in such phenomena as convergence and borrowings. The degree of influence of one language on another one may be different. The social status of contacting languages plays a crucial role due to their distribution and development. Ossetian-Russian language contacts have existed since 1774, when Ossetia became part of Russia. It is necessary to state the unilateral influence of the Russian language on Ossetian, as a result of which the Ossetian language is subject to strong assimilation. The lack of special institutions dealing with the development of the Ossetian language, codification of individual language levels, the poor use of the Ossetian language in various spheres lead to an ever-increasing spread of the Russian language and the gradual disappearance of the Ossetian one. The primary task is to revise textbooks, especially those designed for primary school children. Unreasonable borrowings from the Russian language should be avoided. Russian words should not be used only to demonstrate one or another Russian letter present in the Ossetian alphabet. Borrowings should be “learned” according to the rules of the Ossetian language rather than transliterated.

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**Keywords:** Russian language, Ossetian language, language contacts, bilingualism, assimilation.



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## **1. Introduction**

The interaction of the Russian and Ossetian languages has a long tradition rooted in 1774, when Ossetia joined Russia. Soon after that, the first notes on the Ossetian language appeared. They were written by travelers Nicholas Witsen, Guldenstedt, Pallas, Jacob Reineggs, and Julius von Klaprot (Zevakina, 1967). Thanks to the works of these researchers, scientists learned about the Ossetian and the Ossetian language. And although they did not analyze the language, their merit is great, since they attracted attention of scientists to the people living in the Caucasus, who are descendants of ancient Iranian tribes. In particular, Klaprot believed that the Ossetian language belonged to the Indo-Germanic languages (Zevakina, 1967).

Linguistic confirmation of this thesis required a thorough study of the Ossetian language. The first scientific study of the Ossetian language is the study by Shegren (1944), who wanted to gain the most accurate and detailed knowledge of the inner spirit and structure of the language.

Following Shegren, in 1880, professor of Moscow Imperial University Miller (1992) came to the Caucasus to study the Ossetian language. The result of his acquaintance with a dialect was the second part of “Ossetian Studies” published in 1882.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Despite the fact that the study of phonetics of the Ossetian language has a long tradition, one cannot but take into account the fact that the phonetic level of the language is more susceptible to changes. These changes are due to close contacts with neighboring peoples. It is thanks to the contacts of the Ossetian and Iranian languages with the neighboring Caucasian peoples that the sensory-laryngeal phonemes / p /, / t /, / c /, / k /, / c / entered the Ossetian language.

Given the close contacts with Russian which all residents of Ossetia speak, the influence of the Russian language on the phonological system of Ossetian is evident. Such an influence affects the standardization of the Ossetian literary language.

## **3. Research Questions**

The subject of research and description are Ossetian-Russian language contacts and the degree of influence of the Russian language on Ossetian.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to establish the transition of Ossetian-Russian contacts from the stage of bilingualism to the stage of assimilation of the Ossetian language to the Russian one.

## **5. Research Methods**

The main methods are a critical analysis, a descriptive analysis, a psychological experiment.

## 6. Findings

According to Vinogradov (1978), the opinions of researchers about a literary language are very diverse. There are several reasons for this variety of interpretations. Firstly, a literary language has a wide variety of national forms. An even greater variety of historical forms can be found in diachrony. Secondly, not all native speakers speak the literary language which also increases the diversity of its forms. Thus, being an ideal, the norm of the literary language is varied.

However, scholars are trying to establish criteria that are inherent in the literary language. Filin (1981) believes that language can be considered literary if it is normalized, i.e. regulated by a single norm; stable; obligatory for all native speakers; prevails over other variants (dialects) of the national language; has different functional styles; universal, i.e. it serves all areas of communication; has oral and written forms.

The Ossetian language is not mandatory for members of Ossetian society (most people do not speak Ossetian). It is not universal, since it is not used in all areas of communication. Some language levels, in particular, the phonological one, are not standardized. Most functions of the Ossetian language are performed by the Russian language.

According to Vinogradov (1978), the literary language is a language of writing, a language in which official business documents are written, it is taught in schools, it is a language of science, journalism, fiction. The modern Ossetian language can be considered literary with some reservations: it is spoken by radio and television announcers of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, actors of the North Ossetian State Academic Theater, teachers of schools and universities of the Republic of North Ossetia. At the same time, according to Kambolov (2007), foundations of the Ossetian literary language were not properly fixed and require processing and normalization. Only spelling, morphology, vocabulary, and terminology are more or less standardized.

The issue of normalizing the language cannot be considered separately from the pronunciation norm, since it is part of the language norm and represents the generally accepted use of language means in speech and a set of rules governing the use of these language means in the speech of each member of society (Akhmanova, 2004).

All the rules on correct, normative pronunciation are spontaneous or deliberate. A norm that has developed spontaneously is called uncodified. When fixing the norm, it becomes codified. Codified and uncodified norms exist sequentially, i.e. each modern literary language has gone through both development stages.

In order for an uncodified norm to become codified, certain prerequisites are necessary. If a language becomes national, and the intelligentsia begins to show increased interest in it and realize the need for its regulation, this means the existence of social prerequisites (Raevsky, 1997). If it is possible to ascertain the presence of articulatory phonetics of a given language, which allows one to accurately describe the phonological system of a language and create a phonetic transcription suitable for it. Articulatory phonetics allows you to describe the list of phonemes, their articulation in an isolated form and in speech. The data on articulatory phonetics are the basis for an orthoepic dictionary - the highest stage of codification of the pronunciation norm.

The pronunciation norm of a developed literary language has the following features:

- 1) it is codified, i.e. recorded in special directories;
- 2) it is processed, i.e. subject to certain rules. These rules are the result of selection of the most optimal articulations of individual sounds;
- 3) it is not difficult for learners;
- 4) it is stable and variable at the same time, i.e. it retains its qualities for a certain time and allowing individual rules to be gradually changed in speech communication (which explains the need for a constant review of the norm) (Semenyuk, 1970).

All these signs are internal for the pronunciation norm; thanks to them, the articulatory activity of native speakers is regulated. But when native speakers accept and approve the norm, it acquires two more external features, namely public awareness and obligatory nature.

The modern Ossetian language is not codified. Therefore, it is more correct to talk about the presence of the Ossetian literary language with an uncodified pronunciation norm. The uniqueness of the situation is due to the fact that for the Ossetian language there is a codified norm fixed in 1924 by a resolution of the Joint Congress of North and South Ossetia on culture and education. However, this norm was based on an Iranian dialect. The norm has changed and become sobering. It is a succinct version of the Iranian dialect taught in schools and universities of North Ossetia, it is followed by announcers of the North Ossetian radio and television, actors of the North Ossetian Academic Theater.

The issues of the language norm and the pronunciation norm arise when there are competing options, when the native speaker needs to choose. According to Verbitskaya (2001), “the lack of a clear and concise definition of the norm, debates of linguists are associated with the complexity and inconsistency of the linguistic phenomena” (p. 14). Being a system, a language possesses internal and external properties. The debates are due to the fact that researchers do not distinguish between the norm as an intralingual category, associated with the presence of different potential possibilities for designating the same phenomenon represented by language, and the norm as a choice of one of these possibilities as an exemplary one (i.e. codification) The system provides a number of possibilities for designating the same linguistic essence, without giving preference to any of them. In other words, the norm specifies and limits capabilities of the system.

For example, in Russian, at the end of the word, it is possible to use soft and hard consonants (with the exception of back-lingual ones) phonologically opposed in the language system. Thus, the system allows the pronunciation of reflexive particles of verbs with both hard and soft final consonants: / ucus / and / ucuz /. 50 years ago, the leading option was a solid consonant. For several years, both options have been equal. Today the option / ucus / with solid / s / is considered obsolete.

Another example is pronunciation of solid consonants in front of a front vowel / e / in borrowed words. This new feature is embedded in the phonological system of the Russian language, where the solid consonants ш, ж, ц can be combined with / e /: shest [pole], zhest /gesture/. Shcherba (1974) noted that the pronunciation of te, de, ne, i.e. solid / t /, / d /, / n / in front of the front vowel / e / at the junction of the word, for example, ot etogo [from this], s etim [with this], ob etom [about this], at the junction of the prefix and the root, for example, razedakiy [such]. Thus, there was an expansion of features embedded in the system. However, according to Verbitskaya (2001), the hard consonant is found in unfamiliar words,

while in well-known words the likelihood of a soft consonant increases by 2–3 times. According to Shcherba (1974), “everything that is individual, not stemming from the language system ... dies” (p. 53).

The phonological system affects the appearance of various options for the realization of the same phoneme and the choice of one of the possible options. Sound quality changes only when allowed by the system. In Russian, phonemes / s /, / z /, / c / are always hard, / c / - soft. These phonemes do not form pairs hardness / softness, this feature is not differential for them. Therefore, the system allows the appearance of orthophonic variants of these consonants: softening / s /, / z / before / l /, / n /, softening / c / before / i / in borrowed words, weak palatalization / c / in old Petersburg pronunciation. With the development of a single pronunciation norm, those variants that do not contradict the system can win. The norm is an ideal that all speakers should strive for.

Available variants should not conflict with the system, otherwise the transformation of the phonological level of the language can occur. This is exactly what may happen with the phonological system of the Ossetian language. Let us consider the words borrowed from the Russian language, in which there are letters ya, yo, yu. At the beginning of the word, the letters ya, yo, yu denote combinations of sounds / ja /, / jo /, / ju /. This combination of sounds is not difficult for the Ossetian language; it does not contradict its phonological system. For example, ya in the word yas “value” conveys the same sounds in Ossetian as the Russian letter я. Therefore, it is more logical, write words with initial я, ё, ю in the through ya, yo, yu.

In the middle of the Russian word, these letters denote the palatalization of the consonant before the vowels a, o, u. The letter b does not transmit any sound; it shows that the consonant in front of it is palatalized.

In the Ossetian language, the palatalization of consonants was absent, therefore, for older Ossetians, unlike the modern generation who speak the Ossetian language, it is difficult to pronounce words that contain letters ya, yo, yu in the middle, since it requires raising the front of the back of the tongue, which is not characteristic of the phonological system of the Ossetian language.

In the articulation base of the Ossetian language, the consonants were softened (palatalized) next to the front vowels / i /, / e /. It is known that sounds that appear only in the neighborhood of certain sounds have the status of combinatorial variants.

Russian words with letters ya, yo, yu borrowed from the Russian language without adaptation, provoke pronunciation of palatalized consonants not conditioned by the context. These are independent phonemes. Thus, the borrowing of words from the Russian language into the Ossetian, as well as the inclusion of letters ya, yo, yu in the Ossetian alphabet is the reason for the artificial change in the phonological system of the Ossetian language.

## 7. Conclusion

For the languages under study, borrowing is a natural process of language contacts. The phoneme / ž /, which is an equal member of the phonological system of the German language, entered German through French borrowings. Borrowings cannot have a significant negative impact on the existence of the German language, which has a long written tradition and a large number of native speakers. For the Ossetian language, the situation is different. The main negative factor is the fact that Ossetians speak

Russian. A small number of people living in North Ossetia are native speakers of the Ossetian language. It is necessary to adapt borrowings from the Russian language in accordance with the phonological and phonetic norms of the Ossetian language. In addition, it is necessary to remove letters я, ё, ю, ь from the Ossetian alphabet because they are not characteristic of it. Otherwise, the phonological system of the Ossetian language may change, palatalized consonants may be included in it. Further assimilation can occur at all language levels. Why is it necessary to use words like ёлка, январь, etc. in Ossetian texts that are not proper names, or geographical names, if the Ossetian language has words to denote these concepts: ёлка – зазбæлас, январь – тъæнджы мæй, etc. These words are used in textbooks only in order to demonstrate letters я, ё, ю. Their blind transfer should be avoided, and they should be adapted to the phonetic and phonological norms of the Ossetian language. Otherwise, the word should not and cannot be considered assimilated (Guriev, 1962). Comparing the phonetic design of words borrowed in the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods, Guriev (1962) noted that in the pre-Soviet period there were fewer differences between borrowings and their originals in the Russian language. This is due to the intensified influence of the Russian language on the Ossetian one, constant contacts of the Ossetian and Russian population, and the development of culture, in particular, through newspapers, books, magazines, radio, etc.

As for ёлка, январь, we are forced to admit their phonetic "undeveloped" nature. An increase in the number of such borrowings, as well as their inclusion in the dictionaries of the Ossetian language, can lead to the assimilation of the Ossetian and Russian languages.

The end result of this assimilation may be the disappearance of the Ossetian language. This forecast is confirmed by the monitoring of the language situation in North Ossetia conducted by students of the faculty of foreign languages in January 2019. An anonymous survey of residents of Vladikavkaz, Alagir, Nogir, Komgaron, Kambileevskoye, Sunzha, Oktyabrskoye was conducted. 430 people took part in the survey. An analysis of the answers allowed us to conclude that the majority of respondents use the Russian language in everyday communication. Even respondents who consider Ossetian a native language do not speak it at home or with friends. The presence of the Ossetian surname “allows” them to consider the Ossetian language as their native language. Even in Alagir, whose residents are fluent in the Ossetian language, the situation is getting worse. Only representatives of the older generation use Ossetian in communicating with colleagues, relatives and performing mental activities (92%). Among the younger generation, 30% do not use the Ossetian language at all.

Codification of the orthoepic level of all dialects of the Ossetian language can help avoid further deterioration of the situation. Standardization should be carried out in the near future. Codification of the pronunciation norm can become an important stage in the development of the national Ossetian literary language.

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