



NATIONAL RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY

Institute of Education

# Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Metropolis: Challenges and Opportunities for Georgian Students

Denis Zubalov

21<sup>st</sup> November 2016

[dzubalov@hse.ru](mailto:dzubalov@hse.ru)

*Languages of Moscow*

*Round Table*

*Institute of Linguistics RAS*

# Introduction

Moscow is one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world.

- **Visitors:** Tourists, (illegal) immigrants (predominantly from the former Soviet republics)

Migrate with families (manual labour, children go to school)

- Lack of knowledge of the Russian language/ customs/ traditions/ culture
- Education (good quality of education/equal access/mother tongue education)

# The need for the study

- Increased mobility & globalization: challenged the sustainability of minority groups and their language varieties
- The maintenance of cultural idiosyncrasy and linguistic heritage heavily depends on various cultural and socio-psychological factors, that could be **influenced by education**
- Lack of educational programmes for immigrant children
- **Bilingual advantage: communicative** (Cummins and Swain, 1979; Hakuda and Diaz, 1985; Cummins, 2000; Baker, 2003), **social** (Cummins, 1988), **cognitive** (Bialystok, 1987; Cummins, 1981; Galambos and Hakuda, 1988), **psychological** (Cummins, 1981; 1986).

**Heritage language schools in Moscow: under-researched**

# Moscow school with a Georgian ethno-cultural component





# Портреты старого Тифлиса



# The school today

**Total number of students: 320**

- Mean per class: 29 students (??)

**Ethnic distribution of students:**

Mostly Georgians

**Other ethnicities:**

- Azerbaijani
- Moldovanian
- Kyrgyz
- Russian
- Ukrainian
- Armenian

# The aims of the present study

- To identify what challenges Georgian students face in the Russian system of education and how their linguistic and cultural heritage could provide opportunities

# Theoretical Framework

- Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) as a theoretical framework in the investigation of language shift/maintenance processes.
- It is the property that “makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations” (Giles et al., 1977: 308)
- The authors suggest that if the group’s vitality is assessed as ‘**high**’ it is believed that its members **are likely to maintain their language and culture in multilingual contexts** whereas if the group is assessed to possess ‘**low**’ vitality then its members are considered more prone to **linguistic and cultural assimilation** into the dominant group.

This assessment is based on the three structural components:

- **Status**
- **Demography**
- **Institutional support**



# Methodology

## Qualitative & quantitative

### **Ethnographic Approach**

- **Fieldwork:** 2015-2016
- Ethnography: **participant observation**

Classrooms attended: 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>

- **Note-taking:** within and outside the classroom

lessons of Georgian, Russian & other subjects; communication during school breaks with peers/teachers; national/cultural celebrations, outside school premises

# SEVQ (adapted)

Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality Questionnaire (Bourhis et al., 1981)

**74 Questionnaires** (in Russian)

**Students of 6<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> grades**

## **Place of birth**

- *54.1% born in Russia*
- *43.2% born in Georgia (8.5 mean)*
- *1.3% born in Ukraine*
- *1.3% born in Armenia*

## **Gender**

- *56.1% girls    43.8% boys*

**Age: 12-19**

# Methodology

**Interviews (semi-structured)** shortest 30:40 and longest 53:01

Total amount of time: **5.02 hrs**

## **3 Group Interviews with students**

**1 group interview** with two teachers (of the Russian language and literature & the Georgian language and literature)

**2 individual interviews** with teachers (history / Russian language)

**2 individual interviews** with the headmaster

*Real names have been substituted with pseudonyms*

# **Results & Discussion**

# Opportunities in the school: the Georgian teacher

- Share ethnic, cultural, linguistic background
- Fosters positive attitude towards ethnic language, culture, identity
- Teaches the Russian language and immerses into and the Russian culture & linguistic environment
- Facilitates adaptation and smooth integration
- Mediator between the two cultures
- Parent (school as 'home')



# Why ethno-cultural component?

## Group interview with Maya and Givi (Yana, assistant)

### Interview 2 (00:12-00:46)

DZ: What's the main role, the main function of a teacher in the school with an ethno-cultural component?

Maya: You know what's the main role here? Children **must know their culture, religion**, their **past**, and that they must **be brought up as in Georgia**.

DZ: Uhuh.

Maya: Despite the fact that we're in Russia, it's a totally different country, different traditions let's say, **but our faith, the most important is that it's the same** (Orthodox Christianity, DZ)

DZ: Uhuh, I see.

# Sufficient institutional support

- The school has all the **resources**, and most importantly an explicit mission to fulfil: preserve the ethnic language, culture, traditions, foster Georgian identity implementing Georgian teaching traditions *‘they must be brought up as in Georgia’*
- **Patrimony**: behavioral or implementational system (what the members of a particular ethnic group **do** in order to express their membership: **pedagogical patterns**, music, clothing etc.) (Fishman, 1977)

# School as the place to practice home language

- Those students whose proficiency in Georgian is low have the opportunity to practice Georgian on everyday basis both with peers and teachers in classroom as well as during the breaks

Mother tongue	%
Georgian	82.4
Russian	12.1
Georgian & Russian	4
Armenian	1.3

- 32.4%** medium / low proficiency in Georgian
- 52.6% feel can express themselves easier in Russian**

# Challenges

What language(s) do you use when addressing **the teacher** in/outside the classroom?

In-classroom language use	%
Only/mostly Georgian	0
Equally Georgian and Russian	29.8
Only/mostly Russian	70.1

Outside the classroom language use	%
Only/mostly Georgian	6.7
Equally Georgian and Russian	56.7
Only/mostly Russian	36.4

# Introducing the Russian language and culture

**Group interview** with **Maya** and **Givi** (Yana, assistant).

**Interview 5** (00:48 – 01:40)

Givi: I believe we need to familiarize children, our students, certainly with the *great Russian culture in the first place*. I say this as a teacher of the Russian language because our classrooms are *multinational*..in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade there are 5 nationalities

Maya: Yes, in our class.

Givi: The role of a teacher, not neglecting the national culture, maintaining traditions

Maya: Yes, yes.

DZ: Uhuh

Givi: Customs, values, is to familiarize them with the **great Russian culture in the first place**.



# Newly-arrived students

**Individual interview** with Tamara: a teacher of Russian

- DZ: And what about those students who arrive in Russia and don't speak Russian, do they have the chance..?
- T: No, we usually make them **repeat a year**. That's why we have over-grown-ups in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade (...)
- DZ: So you place them one year down.
- T: Yes, easily, because if children don't understand Russian, they usually can't follow this programme.

# Each student is individual

- T: everybody learns in a different way, they perceive it differently, you see
- DZ: Uhuh
- T: I understood that it's works at an individual level. We had one child, he was very good, he wrote correctly, **he wrote everything** correctly, he spoke...he spoke with an accent **but just couldn't make correct agreement**. He wrote so well that he graduated school with a golden medal (excellent marks, DZ)
- Ya:Uhuh
- T: But as soon as he opens his mouth..no agreement at all!

# Georgian school: teachers as ‘parents’

**Interview:** Follow-up interview with the headmaster (7:49 – 9:14)

- H: Em, this year a new student came to our school, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and on the very first day, 1<sup>st</sup> September celebration, his parents said that it is not a school but **a family** that you have here (laughter).
- DZ: (laughter) Hm.
- (...)
- H: You see, somehow the atmosphere, the attitudes, we have different attitudes with children, it's true. I even sometimes get angry, I say “we ourselves spoil our children” because we are so loyal...(3) **we feel pity for them**, because we take everything into account, we know that they are **not** from this country, that they arrived here, they don't live in their house, **there are many other factors which we need to take into account** and...**we are not very strict with them**. And probably we have the atmosphere of “**home**” at our school.

# Georgian school: teachers as 'parents'

**Group interview** with students of 7<sup>th</sup> grade (06:25 – 06: 44)

DZ: If you had the opportunity to choose between a Russian school and this school, which school would you choose?

**All: This school!!**

(...)

DZ: Why this school?

S1: It's better.

S2: It's **like a family** (...) **teachers are like our parents here.**

S3: It's just close to my house.

# School as 'home'

- Atmosphere of **home, family, shared ethnic background, sense of ethnic group membership** → positive and respectful attitudes towards heritage language, culture maintenance, religion



# General discussion & concluding remarks

- Emotional attachment of Georgian students to their ethnic group, language and culture is high. Emotional attachment is created routinely through the socialization of young generations in a family and educational system (Ehala and Zabrodskaya, 2014). => **hot mode**
- The school has the necessary **resources**; the teachers acknowledge their **dual mission**: increase awareness of Georgian identity, language, culture on the one hand, and integrate students into the Russian system of education on the other.

## **Shared immigrant background & atmosphere of home** (demography)

strengthen students' confidence, motivation, self-esteem, and the feeling of being valued in school => **Unifying force**

- The school system can **play a fundamental role** in encouraging the maintenance of linguistic and cultural heritage. The presence of home language in education is vital for its maintenance and intergenerational transmission (Fishman, 1991; Baker, 2001, Spolsky, 2007).

# General discussion & concluding remarks

## Challenges

- Conforming to official language policy within the classroom environment constitutes a difficult task
- No special teacher training, systematic programme devised for newly arrived children from Georgia (with limited/no proficiency in Russian)
- Individual cases of arrived students (family)
- State exams

# Thank you!

## მადლობა

Special thanks to all the participants: students, teaching staff, the headmaster and Yana.

*photo source: [www.school1331.ru](http://www.school1331.ru)*

