

Unknown Aspects of the Script Changes During Stalin Period

ABSTRACT

1. The report is a part of the project “Representation of the Functioning and the Scientific study of the Abkhazian Language According to Archival Materials” (FR – 23 -15212), financed by Shota Rustaveli Scientific Foundation of Georgia.
2. Digital technologies can significantly contribute to the establishment of the interethnic relations’ history and to bringing the positions of the parties involved closer. In this report we present new materials on specific problems existing in the history of Abkhaz-Georgian relations.
3. There is a heated controversy among Abkhazian and Georgian scholars concerning altering the Abkhazian Language script from Latin to Georgian in 1938. This debate ignores the archival materials from 1926 to 1939, as well as analogs of the mass change of scripts in other republics of the Soviet Union. From 2020 to 2024, we discovered previously undisclosed materials in Georgian archives that represent the situation in Georgia and the analogical processes taking place in other republics.
4. Linguistic policy was decided and controlled by the supreme authorities of the Soviet Union in Soviet Abkhazia and the entire Soviet Empire. The authorities of the peripheries would voice the favorable for the regime initiatives to create the impression of democracy. This happened in 1922-1923 when Azerbaijan posed the issue of converting the languages of peoples of Turanian origin from Arabic to Latin script to ensure the weakening of the influence of religion. This initiative soon spread to languages of different origins, and in 1925, the All-Union Central Committee for the New Turkish Alphabet was founded in Baku; the latter soon was transferred to Moscow and acquired broad functions. This committee had converted about 70 languages to the Latin script by 1936. The hidden motive of the Latinization of the scripts, along with the fight against religion, was the beginning of the implementation of the concept belonging to Lenin and Stalin on merging the languages of the world.
5. The documents (об.: ЦК ВКП(б) и национальный вопрос. 2, 2009) confirm that since 1936 a plan was worked out in the Kremlin to stop the Latinization of languages and switch to the Russian script. The issue was prepared by the All-Union Central Committee of the New Alphabet and the Institute of Languages and Writing of the Peoples of the USSR; the final decision was received by the Organizational Bureau and Central Committee of the Communist Party. The argument cited was the difficulty of the Latin script (Abkhazian was

cited as an example of one of the poor-quality Latinized scripts) and the technical problems of printing. During the Cyrillization of the Kabardian language in 1936, it was officially stated that when this language was switched to Cyrillic, a Kabardian student, after studying the script of his native language, would be able to read and write in the Russian language and be spared of spending of additional energy on studying the latter. The same argument is given in the article of Arsen Hashba (1937): when an Abkhazian pupil learns the Georgian script selected for the Abkhazian language, he/she simultaneously be able to write and read in his/her own language, as well as in Georgian. It becomes obvious that the conversion of the Abkhazian language to Georgian graphics was one of the models for changing the alphabet. The primary goal of both Latinization and Russification was the creation and further deterioration of the contradictions among the ethnic majorities and minorities. Such was the reality not only in Georgia but also in all other republics.

6. We are currently electronically processing unique papers discovered in the Georgian archives, which will be published on our blog and made available to anyone interested in the subject.

Keywords: Unknown documents in the history of writing systems; Digitization of archival documents; New information on Soviet language policy; Digitization of documents on linguistic conflict; Digital documentation of Stalinist policy.