

# Nationality and Ethnicity of Tsovatush People from Sociolinguistic Viewpoint

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**Abstract.** The report shows an attempt to reveal the issue concerning nationality and ethnicity of the minority language collective – Tsovatush people – by using sociolinguistic parameters. Tsovatushs have lived in Zemo Alvani – the small village of Georgia for nearly two centuries together with Georgians. At earlier times they had lived in the mountainous side of Georgia. There aren't the exact information in Historiography when and how they had settled there, this is the reason of dissimilarities of the ideas between the scientists. Most of the scientists regard them as descendants of Kist-Gligvis according to the different language, but some of them consider they are inseparable part of Georgian ethno-social body.

Up to the present times, there hasn't been an attempt in scientific literature to discuss the mentioned issue from sociolinguistic viewpoint. Scientific comprehension of language shift process, also using the methods of comparing and combining the sources and the opinions expressed in scientific literature reveals, that Tsovatushs represent the ethnos of Nakh origin (or ethnical group).

**Keywords:** Tsovatushs, Ethnical Group, Language Shift, Ethno Nation, Linguistic Area.

## 1. Introduction

Tsovatush language is the member of Nakh group of Iberian-Caucasian language family and Georgian language belongs to Kartvelian group of the same language family. The language is equitably regarded as the strong characteristic of ethnicity as it combines the people's culture, beliefs, opinions, world perception and etc. While discussing the origin of Tsovatushs, the scientists pay attention to the language, they focus on it as the main characteristic of ethnicity; accordingly they conclude, that the people bearing the different language is the other ethnos.

In scientific literature two factors are mentioned as the reasons why Tsovatushs spoke in different language at the period of living in Mtatusheti as well: 1. They were Georgians even at first and after having close relationship with the people of Nakh origin living in neighbored countries or with the people also with Nakh origin living on the same geographical borders (Georgian territory), they learned their language. V. Elanidze connected Tsovatushs with Vainakh tribes in his earlier works and in his current work he notes: "we consider bilingualism as the legal outcome of Tsovas' history, accordingly the key of their history should be found here as well: we regard Tsova, Tsova-Tush (Bats) language as the language acquired by Tsovas from the population of Chechen-Ingush origin, but Georgian should always be their mother language and even this time, the mentioned language has the same function for Tsovas" (Elanidze 2006: 186). 2. They belonged to the other ethnos and as a result of historical conditions they appeared in Mtatusheti, or they lived in Georgia even at first and were the representatives of its autochthon population (though were included in another ethnos). The work explains and analyses how it is possible that each factor named here should be proper with the truth from sociolinguistic standpoint. Actuality of the theme is conditioned by polemics on ethnicity of Tsovatushs made in scientific literature.

## 2. Submitting

The methods recognized in the science are used in the research process. These are the following: observation on the materials (in our case observation on historical sources) and systematization; analysis of the materials: segmentation and defining the interrelations between segmented elements; synthesis of the gained outcomes: integration and interpretation, also the methods of incorporation and comparison of the

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sources and the opinions expressed in scientific literature. The main thing is that we worked under the scientific essence of language shift process: when and in which conditions it can be organized and whether it was possible to take place while living of Tsovatushs in mountainous side of Georgia.

### 3. Discussion

If Tsovatushs were the representatives of Georgian ethnos even at first, we may think that they acquired the language of their Nakh group either: 1. as a result of having neighbored relationship with the people of Nakh origin living in the contiguous countries, or: 2. as a result of having relationship of the same people on their own (Georgian) territory.

These two probabilities are combined by the fact of language shift, which may be resulted by language contacts. It's interesting from sociolinguistic viewpoint whether this result in each given case was probable or not? In other words, if language shift was possible in those contact situations?

For language shift the essential condition is the united linguistic space, which is created only in contact situation, or in united geographical or political-economical-cultural areas. "Language shift is the process by which a speech community in a contact situation (i.e. consisting of bilingual speakers) gradually stops using one of its two languages in favor of the other", \_ writes Ravindranath (**Ravindranath**, 2009) (definitions on language shift. See also: Kandler, 2010; Hoffman, 1991: 186);

The theme concerning the language shift became the most actual in the globalization epoch (See: Abbott, 2013; Watson 2007: 252-265; Mufwene 2002: 32).

In order to get the language mix, the people speaking in these languages should live in one and the same geographical borders and share one and the same political, economical or cultural structure; otherwise, neighboring relationship or the closeness of the borders of the countries isn't enough for language shift. In this case the language mixture would take place between the people living in any two contiguous countries.

Just the common bilingual area creates the proper basis for language shift. Any group living in this area is more successful (advanced in number) from political, economical, cultural and other standpoints. As it owes the dominative management, it subordinates the weak group. Accordingly, the language is shifted to the language of the strong group. As Crawford notes, "death of the language doesn't happen in privileged societies" (Crawford 1995: 35; See also: Dressler 1988: 79-91; May 2008: 1; Henze... 1999: 3-21; Denison 2009: 21).

It's impossible for the countries independent from each other (countries of Georgia and North Caucasia inhabited with the people of Nakh origin) but with common borders to have the united political-economical-social and accordingly linguistic area (it's possible only in the common boundaries, or in the bounds of one country); as well as it's impossible to admit in such conditions the shift of Tsovatush language to the language of the contiguous country. Thus, from the sociolinguistic viewpoint, we should exclude the theoretical and practical possibilities of the realias of the first item of the abovementioned reason (Tsovatushs acquired the language while having relations with the people resident of the neighbored countries).

As for the second item as if Tsovatushs acquired the language on their own territories as a result of having interrelations with the people of Nakh origin, in other words the fact of language shift took place on the own territory, it's realization would be possible only if:

Nakhs represented the majority of the population on the territory of Mtatushetiand Georgians (Tushs) were the minority people on their own territory;

This situation continued for centuries: only one or two centuries aren't enough for the language shift, it needs the long period. If we also take into consideration that in this case the language shift should be ended in fatal result – the language death (as we have the steps of language shift from Tsovatush to Georgian in linguistic literature from XVII century till present or since they settled in the valley, in other words if we'll suppose that one part of Tsovatushs forgot Georgian and therefore, was shifted to Nakh group language, we may conclude that this fact is reality, afterwards the language shift to Georgian language was begun, which means back process took place), it needed more time;

If the people with Nakh origin had in power the political, economical and social management and Georgians (Tushs) were subordinated on them, it would make them learn the dominated language.

What can we inform from history of Georgia on the mentioned issue? Was there the period when the people of Nakh origin represented the dominated caste on the territory of Georgia, namely in Mtatusheti for centuries?

As G. Melikishvili writes, the tribes of North-Caucasian kin already lived in the North and the East in II-I millenniums (Melikishvili 1951: 130). “That part of Caucasus systematically threw those waves of the people to South (Melikishvili, the same: 130-131). The written sources as well confirm this fact concerning throwing such waves of the people from that part of Caucasus since VIII century BC. This fact took place even at earlier periods. The important part of the people should be thrown in the middle times of II millennium BC (the same: 131-132). These tribes come from North Caucasia, were spread in Georgian tribe and became Georgians (the same: 132).

G. Melikishvili convincingly writes, that coming of North Caucasian tribes and settlement in Georgian environment took place in the conditions of Georgians’ hegemony (the same: 138).

“Kartlis Tskhovreba” (literally “Life of Kartli”) keeps the significant information by Saurmagi, the son of Parnavaz on settlement of Caucasian people in Georgia (Life of Kartli, II, 1995: 27). Connected to the fact, T. Uturgaidze considers that this Nakh stream underwent the total assimilation in Georgian environment (Uturgaidze 1966: 12-13).

In this context the most important fact for us is that Georgian tribes happened assimilation of Northern Caucasian tribes and not on the contrary, which excludes once more the possibility that one of Tush communities learned Tsovatush language.

According to the information by Ivane Javakhishvili, Georgia had close political-economical and cultural relations with Dzurduks and with the people of the whole Northern Caucasus since III century BC. Meanwhile, Georgia placed these tribes under its own power in the boundaries of Georgian state (Javakhishvili 1919: 3).

Thus, we can find in History of Georgia the information about living of Nakh tribe in Georgia, namely in East mountainous part, but not with the status of dominated group. It was more possible that Nakh tribes living on the territory of Georgia since the earlier times or settled afterwards, which would appear under jurisdiction of the receiver country and share Georgian political or economical-social life, would meanwhile join the local dominant population and stay on the way of becoming Georgian, which we’ll observe in Tsovatush-Georgian relations as well as the processes, which were taking place on the territory of Georgia for millenniums due to the confirmed information.

Therefore, by considering several criteria, we should also exclude the probability of the language shift of one community of Tushs living on the territory of Georgia to the language of the people with Nakh origin living on the same territory.

Only the second reason mentioned above is left: Tsovatushs represented other ethnos (or ethnical group). We conclude it on the basis of sociolinguistic analysis of the issue. As a result of historical conditions 1. they appeared in this peculiar geographical area – Mtatusheti; 2. or they (Nakhs) lived here even at first and represented aboriginal population of Georgia, as it’s indicated in Georgian soviet encyclopedia (GSE, 1986: 459).

If we admit, that ancestors of Tsovatushs – independent ethnos (or ethnical group) of Nakh origin – are arrived in Tusheti (as G. Melikishvili notes, it should happen millenniums ago), we can confirm that since that period they share the common political, economical, social, cultural, religious and linguistic area with Georgian people. Accordingly, by providing these parameters, they won’t be considered as separate ethnos independent from Georgian people in the given historical time.

If we take into consideration the political importance of the nation, Tsovatushs belong to Georgians as they are the citizens of Georgia. It means they are of Georgian nationality. From the political significance Tsovatush nation doesn’t exist. It becomes obvious they aren’t regarded as the nation from the ethnical point of view. For ethno-nation (ethnical perception of the nation) it’s necessary to have the own sovereign state in

the past, where the native language of this ethnos would be the official and literary language of the country (see Davitashvili 2003: 11; Stanf. Encycl. 2001). As History of Tsovatushs is unknown and we have no information if they had a sovereign state as well as the mother language with state status, we can't regard them as ethno-nation. Nowadays, they are the inseparable part of Georgian ethnos and are included only in Georgian ethnos.

According to one definition in social anthropology, ethnicity is self-perception, which ethnical group do individuals belong due to their opinion. Absolute majority of Tsovatushs regard themselves as Tsovatushs and therefore, Georgians.

Non-homogenous attitude towards the issue dealing with the origin of Tsovatushs as well as the deplorable attitude towards this group itself, as A. Bertlani notes, caused "psychological breakup of Tsovas and concussion of their self-perception as Georgians" (Bertlani 2009: 59).

M. Machabeli equitably writes that like other Tushs Tsovatushs are Georgians with their consciousness (Machabeli 1900).

V. Itonishvili notes: "genetic connection of Tsovas-Tushs with Vainakh world isn't totally the fundamental to ignore Georgian nationality of Tsovatushs and the scientists of their circle. It would be anti-Georgian attitude" (Itonishvili 2012: 215).

Tsovatushs are the part of Georgian ethnos. Like Khevsurians, Kakhetians, Imeretians, Gurulians, Phshavs, Svans and etc., they are inseparable part of Georgian cultural, political, social or life areas.

Thus, the society to be investigated is Georgian, in the historical time accessible for the researcher it is neither the separate ethnos nor the ethnical group, though at first they should be the ethnical group or even the separate ethnos.

According to the abovementioned, how can we call them? We think, it will be right if we say on them the language collective or the language group (certainly, it's the same), or we'll make their identification from the language standpoint and not by the other viewpoint.

In scientific literature the speaking society, the language society or others are distinguished. In speaking society the group of people speaking in any territorial variety (dialect) is meant, which tries to have relations with the society speaking in other territorial variety with the help of the common language.

The language society is regarded as the group, which speaks in other language (not in the language variety) and thus, it differs from other language group just with the language (not with the language variety) (See: Hudson 2001: 24; Lyons 1970: 326; Hockett 1958: 8; Hudson 2001: 24; Bloomfield 1933: 42; Gumperz 1962: 71, 101; Gumperz 1968: 71, 114).

Tsovatushs create the language society as they speak in other language (not in the language variety). Being Tushs means being Georgians for Tsovatushs, or self-investigation on the level of community is arisen up to the self-investigation on the level of nation. While writing on Tsovatushs, we should provide it.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Studying the issue showed us, that Tsovatushs couldn't be the representatives of Georgian ethnos at first and couldn't shift to the language of the neighbored country of North Caucasus, as the independent countries – Georgia and North Caucasus inhabited by the people with Nakh origin, had no common political-economical-social and accordingly, linguistic area. Thus, the idea that Tsovatushs acquired the language as a result of having relations with the people living in the neighbored countries is excluded from the sociolinguistic standpoint. They couldn't acquire the language on the own territory – of Georgia – after having connection with the people of Nakh origin, as the fact of the shift of Georgian language to the foreign language in the conditions of Georgians' hegemony wouldn't be realized.

By providing the abovementioned, the following was revealed, that Tsovatushs represented other ethnos (or ethnical group). As a result of historical conditions they appeared in the mountainous part of Georgia or they (Nakhs) lived here even at first and represented aboriginal population of Georgia.

The fact that Tsovas are local or settled population has no essential significance for defining their ethnicity.

If we admit, that ancestors of Tsovatushs – independent ethnos (or ethnical group) of Nakh origin – are arrived in Tusheti, we can confirm that since that period they share the common political, economical, social, cultural, religious and linguistic area with Georgian people. Accordingly, by providing these parameters, they won't be considered as separate ethnos independent from Georgian people in the given historical time.

If we take into consideration the political importance of the nation, Tsovatushs belong to Georgians as they are the citizens of Georgia. It means they are of Georgian nationality. From the political significance Tsovatush nation doesn't exist. As History of Tsovatushs is unknown and we have no information if they had a sovereign state as well as the mother language with state status, we can't regard them as ethno-nation. Nowadays, they are the inseparable part of Georgian ethnos and are included only in Georgian ethnos.

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