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Endangered Caucasian languages in Georgia

Linguistic parameters of language endangerment¹

Jost Gippert

The paper discusses several linguistic peculiarities of three endangered Caucasian languages of Georgia that are currently being documented within the DoBeS “ECLinG” project, viz. Swan, Tsova-Tush (Batsbi), and Udi. The main focus lies on questions of the phonology (vowel systems, pharyngeal and laryngeal subsystems) and the morphosyntax (verbal agreement, ergativity) of these languages. The second part of the paper is devoted to the question whether the audiovisual material collected in the course of the project admits of establishing linguistic parameters of language endangerment with respect to the languages in question.

o. Introduction

The Caucasus has been renowned since antiquity as an area with an extraordinarily high number of distinct languages. We may conclude from statements of Greek authors such as the geographer Strabo that the comparatively small area extending between the Black and the Caspian Sea, with the Caucasus main ridge splitting it into a northern and a southern part, was the refuge of nearly as many different linguistic varieties then as it is still today.² The linguistic diversity of yore has not only survived until the present but has even been considerably extended by the migration of speakers of Indo-European, Turkic, Mongolian, Semitic and other languages into the area. Today, the linguistic map of the Caucasus area comprises approximately 40 “autochthonous” languages, pertaining to three families (South Caucasian = Kartvelian, (North-)West-Caucasian,

1. My thanks are due to Wolfgang Schulze as well as two anonymous referees who read a previous version of this paper and made valuable suggestions as to its contents and its wording. It goes without saying that all remaining errors are mine.

2. Cf. Strabo, *Geographica*, book 11, chap. 2, par. 16, who reports that the Caucasian isthmus counted between 70 and 300 (!) different peoples, all using different languages. The often cited term “mountain of tongues” seems first to have been used by the Arab geographer al-Mas’ūdī (10th century).

(North-)East-Caucasian) which have not been proved to be genetically related with each other, but also Indo-European languages such as Armenian, Russian, (Pontic) Greek, Kurdish (Kurmanjī), Zazaki, Ossetic (Iron / Digor), Tātī and Tālyši, Turkic languages such as Turkish, Azerī (Azerbaijani), Karachay, Balkar, Kumyk, Noghay, Turkmen (Trukhmen) and Karapapak, the Semitic language Aysor (“Assyrian”, East-Aramaic), and Mongolian Kalmyk.³ Furthermore, there are minor communities of speakers of other languages such as German, Estonian, and Mordvin (Finno-Ugric).

The fact that this diversity could persist for millennia in spite of the great many controversies the region has been facing in historical times is all the more remarkable as many of the idioms in question seem never to have been spoken by more than a few hundred speakers and most of the languages, esp. those pertaining to the “autochthonous” Caucasian families, have never been used in written form. As a matter of fact, not more than 15 Caucasian languages have adopted a written standard today, mostly in connection with a more widespread usage as *linguae francae* of certain regions. Only one of the autochthonous Caucasian languages, viz. Georgian, has had a longer historical tradition as a written language, persisting continuously since the 5th century A.D.; for most of the other “literary languages” of the region, the beginning of literacy was a matter of the late 19th century (a few earlier attempts notwithstanding), and it was only in Soviet times that they could develop a written tradition (including printed media) of their own (Abkhaz, Abaza, Adyghe, Kabardian, Chechen, Ingush, Avar, Lak, Dargwa, Lezgi, Tabasaran, Aghul, Tsakhur, and Rutul).

There are good reasons to believe that with the verge of the 21st century, the amazing historical stability of the linguistic landscape of the Caucasus is coming to an end. With the breakdown of the Soviet hegemony and the emergence of independent national states, the situation of most of the minor languages, especially those that have not adopted a written standard, has dramatically deteriorated. This is true not only for those regions of the Caucasus which still belong to the state of Russia but also for the three Transcaucasian states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. In most cases, we are witnessing an increasing tendency towards the dominance of major languages here which are now, much more than before, regarded as a matter of national identity (Georgian in the case of Georgia, Armenian in Armenia, Azeri in Azerbaijan). In the course of the armed conflicts the region has seen since 1989, beginning with the Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, many of the minor ethnic groups have been afflicted by expulsion

3. Cf. the language map in <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/didact/karten/kauk/kaukas.htm>. For larger surveys of the languages of the Caucasus cf. Geiger e.a. (1959), Bokarev/Lomtadidze (1967), Klimov (1965/1971 and 1989/1994), Greppin (1991–), Jarceva (1999), and <http://armazi.uni-frankfurt.de/armaziII/enebi.htm>.

or deportation, with the result of linguistic communities being dissolved or even annihilated. This holds true, e.g., for the Svan speaking settlements in the Kodori valley of Western Georgia which, as a consequence of the Georgian-Abkhaz war in the 1990s, were partially removed to a region south of the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, thus being forced to give up their contact with both the main Svan speaking area (in Svanetia in North-West Georgia) and their traditional (high-mountain) environment. Another such case is the community of Udi speakers of Vartashen (now Oghuz) in Azerbaijan who were expelled from their home village (to Armenia, Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) after being suspected of collaborating with the Armenians.

This is all the more regrettable since many of the languages in question have not been documented to such an extent that the peculiarities making them especially valuable for linguistic studies would have been preserved for future generations of investigators. It is true that a considerable amount of linguistic fieldwork on most of the Caucasian languages has been undertaken, esp. by Russian and Georgian linguists but also by Western scholars, in Tsarist and Soviet times; but the material thus achieved and published has proved to be mostly very uniform and many facets of the linguistic variety of the languages in question have been neglected. In the DoBeS⁴ project “Endangered Caucasian languages in Georgia (ECLinG)” we⁵ have been running since 2002, we have endeavoured to overcome this situation at least for three minor languages that are likely to be abandoned in the near future, viz. Svan, Tsova-Tush (also known as Batsbi or Bats), and Udi. On the basis of ca. 70 hours of audio-video recordings undertaken with various speakers at various places, we hope to have prepared a solid base for research into all areas of the linguistics (phonology, morphology, syntax etc.) of these languages.

In the present paper, I first wish to outline some of the most striking features of the three languages, focussing on their peculiarities in phonology and morphosyntax which make these languages especially interesting both for general linguistics and for studying the linguistic area of the Caucasus. In the major part of the paper, I shall discuss the question to what extent the material we have collected can be used to determine the degree of endangerment of the three languages and to establish linguistic parameters of language endangerment that account for them.

4. “Dokumentation bedrohter Sprachen” (Documentation of Endangered Languages); funding programme of the Volkswagen Foundation, cf. <http://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/index.php?id=172&L=1>.

5. The project team consists of J. Gippert, W. Schulze, M. Tandashvili (Germany), M. Machavariani, B. Shavkhelishvili, I. Chantlaze, R. Topchishvili, R. Ioseliani, M. Saghliani (Georgia) and other participants; cf. the project webpage <http://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/ecling/ecling.htm>.

As the exploitation of the data we have collected has only just begun, many of the observations and conclusions presented below must be regarded as preliminary.

1. Phonological peculiarities

1.1 Svan

The Svan language, mostly spoken in the high mountain region of Western Georgia, is a member of the so-called Kartvelian or South Caucasian family which also includes Georgian, the dominant language of the country, as well as Megrelian (Mingrelian) and Laz. In traditional view, Svan is divided into four clearly distinguished dialects, Upper and Lower Bal (constituting the “Upper Svan” dialect group) and Lashkhian and Lentekhian (“Lower Svan”); whether the variety of Cholur must be regarded as another dialect of Lower Svan is a matter of debate which we hope to shed new light upon with the recordings we have made.⁶ The most striking feature of Svan with respect to phonology is the structure of the vowel system which is, at the same time, the most prominent feature distinguishing the dialects: While Lentekhian has a relatively reduced set consisting of but seven vowels (/i e ä a i̇ o u/) and thus hardly exceeding the “classical” system of cardinal vowels (/i e a o u/) we meet with in standard Georgian,⁷ the maximal system to be observed in some Upper Bal varieties comprises up to 18 vowel phonemes, the system being characterized by several “umlaut” vowels and a thorough length opposition. Lower Bal, Lashkhian and Cholurian are somewhat in between, missing either the length opposition or some or all umlaut vowels (cf. Table 1 where the five systems are contrasted with the Georgian one). These divergences are all the more astonishing as the region that is covered by the Svan dialects is rather small and there are no areal factors discernable which might be responsible for such a diversification, given that the West Caucasian languages neighbouring in the North and West, Abkhaz and Circassian, are notorious for their minimal vowel systems and Turkic Karachay, as well neighbouring in the North, has no long vowels. From a general point of view, the huge inventory of vowels in the Svan dialects is all the more remarkable as the consonant system of the language, which is characterized by the “typical Caucasian” triad of stops and affricates (voiceless-glottalized,

6. For general descriptions of Svan cf., e.g. Topuria (1967), Gippert (1986), Gudžedžiani/Palmaitis (1986), Schmidt (1991), Tuite (1997), and Šaradzenidze (1999). A Svan-English dictionary is Gudžedžiani/Palmaitis (1985); the most extensive dictionary of Svan is Topuria / Kaldani (2000). The oldest audio recordings of Svan that are still available today were made by Adolf Dirr in 1909; cf. the edition in Gippert (1986).

7. Megrelian has the same system, extended by a mid-high /i/ vowel in some of its varieties.

Table 1.

	short vowels		long vowels	
	non-umlauted	umlauted	non-umlauted	umlauted
Lentekhian	i e a i o u	ä		
Cholurian	i e a i o u	ä	ī ē ā ī ō ū	ā
Lashkhian	i e a i o u		ī ē ā ī ō ū	
Lower Bal	i e a i o u	ä ö ü		
Upper Bal	i e a i o u	ä ö ü	ī ē ā ī ō ū	ā ō ū
Georgian (standard)	i e a o u			

voiceless-aspirated, voiced), is not less voluminous, consisting of 30 phonemes and thus also exceeding that of Georgian.⁸

The picture becomes even more complicated when we regard the Svan speaking community of the Kodori valley. As the peculiarities of “Kodori Svan” have never been described so far, we decided to pay special attention to it within the ECLinG project. This was all the more necessary as with the resettlement of most of the Svan speaking inhabitants of the Kodori valley in South-East Georgia, the peculiarities of their variety are likely to get lost soon.⁹ It is clear now that this community consists of speakers of both the Upper and Lower Bal dialects who must have moved to the more western Kodori region during the past three or so centuries, establishing a mixed dialect area there.

1.2 Tsova-Tush (Batsbi)

Different from Svan, the Tsova-Tush (or Batsbi) language, an affiliate of the Nakh group of East-Caucasian languages which also includes Chechen and Ingush, exhibits no dialectal variation at all. This may be due to the fact that today, the language is spoken in but one village, viz. Zemo-Alvani in Eastern Georgia.¹⁰ The phonological system of Batsbi (which is the self-designation of the people) is characterized by several peculiarities which go beyond what we would expect from a genetical or areal point of view and which may turn out crucial for phonological

8. Cf. <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/didact/didact2.htm#cauclaut> for listings of the systems in question.

9. A first specimen of our recordings of Kodori Svan was published in Čantlaže (2002).

10. For general accounts of Tsova-Tush cf., e.g., Schiefner (1859), Dešeriev (1953 and 1967), Holisky/Gagua (1994), and Črelašvili (1999 and 2002). The only Tsova-Tush dictionary existing is Kadagiže/Kadagiže (1984; Tsova-Tush–Georgian–Russian); the remarkable work, which was compiled in the 1930ies, comprises, on 935 hand-written pages, ca. 7000 lemmatic entries with sample sentences.

theories in general. This is true, e.g., for the status of long vowels,¹¹ but also for the emergence of nasalized and reduced vowels, both occurring as a result of reductions in word-final positions.¹² It is also true for the so-called “strong” consonants which must be kept distinct from mere geminates even though they may resemble them at first glance. The most fascinating feature of Batsbi phonology, however, consists in a set of four or five pharyngeal and laryngeal consonants and the clusters they produce with neighbouring consonants. Given that the number of pharyngeals and laryngeals in Batsbi is a matter of controversy,¹³ a thorough investigation of the system is required offhand. What is more, some of the consonants in question seem to have some peculiar influence on the colouring of adjacent vowels. Thus it is to be expected that the recordings we have made will shed new light not only upon the phonology of Batsbi itself but also on questions of general interest such as, e.g., Indo-Europeanists’ laryngeal theory. Cf. Table 2 which gives some examples of words containing pharyngeal consonants and their phonetic realization.¹⁴

1.3 Udi

For Udi, which belongs to the Lezgian group of East-Caucasian languages, the question of dialects is crucial again.¹⁵ Until the beginning of the 20th century,

11. Cf. Holisky/Gagua (1994: 152) for the uncertain status of long vowels in Batsbi.

12. Cf. Holisky/Gagua (1994: 155ff.) for a treatise of the processes involved.

13. Holisky/Gagua (1994: 150) list two “radico-pharyngeal” continuants, voiced [ʃ] and voiceless [h], and two voiceless “glottal” obstruents, the stop [ʔ] and the continuant [h]. Dešeriev (1953: 29 and 1967: 229) and Črelašvili (1999: 197) have a set of five consonants instead, adding a voiced pharyngeal stop to the list (transcribed ⟨l⟩, vs. ⟨l̥⟩, ⟨x̥⟩, ⟨ɸ̥⟩, and ⟨xl̥⟩, in the Russian transcription system used); the same holds true for Črelašvili (1975: 15 and 31ff.) who uses the symbols ⟨Q⟩, ⟨ʃ̥⟩, ⟨ʃ̥̣⟩, ⟨ɸ̥̣⟩, and ⟨ʃ̥̣̣⟩. In our material, we have tried to apply a distinction of five sounds, denoting them by [ʃ], [h̃], [h], [ʔ], and [h]; the exact phonetic nature of the pharyngeals and their phonemic distribution must still be determined, however. It seems at first glance that the voiced pharyngeal stop is the regular allophone of its fricative counterpart (or vice-versa, as proposed by Dešeriev 1953: 29 and Črelašvili 1975: 34), occurring only in word-initial position. The correctness of this assumption remains to be checked, however.

14. Cf. Holisky/Gagua (1994: 154) for a list containing clusters with the two “pharyngeal fricatives”, [h̃] and [ʃ].

15. For general accounts of Udi cf., e.g., Schiefner (1859), Dirr (1904), Pančvidze/Džeiranišvili (1967), Džeiranišvili (1971 and 1999), Pančviže (1974), and Schulze (1982 and 1994). The only existing dictionary is Łukasyan (1974). The first audio recordings of Udi available were made in 1909 by Adolf Dirr; they are preserved in the Audiovisual Archive (Phonogrammarchiv) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Table 2.

	phonological structure	phonetic realization
/f̥/		
‘wolf’ (abs.sg.)	/b̥f̥oɾç/	[b̥f̥oɛɾts’]
‘outside’	/n̥f̥aʔin/	[n̥f̥aʔin]
‘four’ (IIIrd cl. / Vth cl.)	/d̥hiv, b̥hiv /	[d̥hiv, b̥hiv]
‘eye’ (instr.sg.)	/b̥f̥ar̥çev/	[b̥f̥ar̥k’ev]
‘wet’	/t̥f̥aʔe/	[t̥’f̥aʔe] ?
‘I will spin it’	/h̥al-d̥f̥aʔoes/	[h̥ald̥f̥aʔoes]
‘evil-speaking, barking’	/f̥av-al:ar/	[f̥av al:ar]
/s/		
‘Ambarča’ (place name)	/ʃambar̥ça, ʃumbar̥ça/	[ʃambart̥ʃa, ʃo̞umbart̥ʃa]
‘winter’ (loc.sg.)	/ʃalix/	[ʃalix̣]
‘iron’ (instr.sg.)	/ʃeix̣ḳev/	[ʃeix̣ḳ’ev]
‘to run’	/ʃit̥dano/	[ʃit̥dan̥o̞]
/h/		
‘one’	/cha/	[cha]
‘dog’	/p̥hu/	[p̥hu]
‘you are asleep’	/thih/	[thih]
‘I will spin it’	/h̥al-d̥f̥aʔoes/	[h̥ald̥f̥aʔoes]

the use of Udi was restricted to two villages in Northwest-Azerbaijan, Vartashen and Nidj, both locations representing clearly distinguishable dialect areas. In the early 1920ies, a group of Udi people from Vartashen moved to Eastern Georgian and founded a new village there (Zinobiani, later called Oktomberi). While the “original” Vartashen community was nearly dissolved in the late 1980s by virtue of the Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes,¹⁶ Oktomberi (which has been the object of the ECLinG project) has persisted as a Vartashen-Udi speaking village up till now. Due to the necessities of intratribal marriage, however, an increasing number of (female) Nidj speakers have been introduced into the village so that today, both varieties are met with, with mutual interferences at least on an idiolectal level, in Oktomberi.

As to its phonology, the most striking feature of Udi surely consists in pharyngealized vowels, and this can still be observed in Oktomberi although it seems to be given up at least by (the few) younger speakers. Table 3 contains a list of minimal pairs provided by one of our consultants, a former school teacher (of Georgian – Udi is not taught at schools). On the basis of the recordings we have

16. According to Schulze (2005a: 55), about 50 Udi speakers have remained in Vartashen (now named Oghuz); Nešumašvili (2004: 71) speaks of ca. 90 remaining persons.

Table 3.

<i>oma</i>	<i>k'oyn</i>	<i>biḡ</i>	<i>xa</i>	<i>beš</i>	
'thigh'	'wine-jar' (gen.)	'moustache'	'worm'	'our'	
<i>o'ma</i>	<i>k'o'yn</i>	<i>bi'ḡ</i>	<i>xa'</i>	<i>be'š</i> ¹⁷	
'strawberry'	'felt cap'	'loins'	'dog'	'before'	etc.

made, the production of these vowels can now much more easily be studied than ever before.¹⁸

2. Morphology and morphosyntax

2.1 Noun, pronoun and verb morphology in Tsova-Tush (Batsbi) and Udi

2.1.1 Tsova-Tush (Batsbi)

Of the two East-Caucasian languages under investigation here, only Batsbi has preserved the outstanding feature of nominal morphology of this language family, viz. the system of noun classes. While the exact number of classes to be envisaged in Batsbi is a matter of debate again, most investigators have agreed so far that there are at least five classes distinguishable, leaving a few words that must be taken either as exceptions or as constituents of further classes.¹⁹ Only classes I and II have a clear semantic basis denoting male and female persons, respectively. As in other East-Caucasian languages, the pertinence of a given noun to one of the classes is normally not visible in the noun itself but only by concord elements in a verb or adjective agreeing with it. Cf., e.g., Table 4 which shows the different concord forms the 3rd person present form of the copula has depending on the class of its subject. With the material now available in our recordings,²⁰ we hope to shed

17. It is true that this word should have a different sibilant (*š*) in Vartashen Udi; cf. the entries БЕ'БIII vs. БЕIII in Lukasyan (1974: 80). The distinction of /s/ and /š/ tends to be lost in Oktomberi, however.

18. A first spectrographic investigation of the pharyngealized vowels of Udi with respect to their acoustical characteristics was undertaken by N. Gamqrelize in the 1990ies. Only a short summary of the results were published by the author (in 1996), and they do not include any indication on the production of these vowels.

19. Dešeriev (1967) distinguishes eight classes while Holisky/Gagua (1994) propose to confine the number of classes proper to five. The latter authors acknowledge "approximately twenty-two nouns" that must be regarded as exceptions (1994: 162).

20. Among the languages under investigation here, Batsbi is the one with the least amount of published texts. Letting apart the few minor text pieces which were printed in connection with the grammatical treatises mentioned above, the collection of poems by Joseb Longišvili (2001) is the only collection of Batsbi texts available in print.

Table 4.

Class	I (masc.)	II (fem.)	III	IV	V
Singular	<i>v-a</i>	<i>y-a</i>	<i>d-a</i>	<i>y-a</i>	<i>b-a</i>
Plural	<i>b-a</i>	<i>d-a</i>	<i>d-a</i>	<i>y-a</i>	<i>d-a</i>

Table 5.

<i>ba-ne-ke</i>	<i>te-ne-ba-ke</i>	<i>ga-ne-ba-ke</i>	<i>tya-ne-ba-ke</i>
'(he, she, it) was'	'was not'	'there was'	'there was'

some new light on the Batsbi noun classes, esp. with respect to the number and distribution of the pertaining nouns.²¹

2.1.2 Udi

In Udi, the East Caucasian class concord system has been totally abandoned, leaving but a few fossilized traces in pronouns (cf., e.g., *be-zi* 'my' vs. *zu* 'I') and verbs (esp. the many verbs with pseudo-"roots" beginning with *b-*).²² The most striking features of "living" Udi morphology contrasting it with Batsbi and other East Caucasian languages, however, consist in the existence of clitic person markers, the exhaustive usage of "light verbs" building compound verbal lexemes, and the interplay of verbal morphemes, person markers and other elements in the formation of verbal forms. Cf., e.g., Table 5 showing several past tense forms of the verb *baksun* 'to be', with the clitic 3rd person marker *-ne-* appearing in a "Wackernagel" position either after the first element of the verbal "root" or after other elements such as the negation particle *te* or the locational adverbs *ga* and *tya*.

baksun itself often appears as a "light" verb element in intransitive verbs, its transitivizing counterpart being *besun*, lit. 'to make'. Another transitivizing element is *pesun*, lit. 'to speak, say', contrasting with intransitivizing *esun*, lit. 'to go'²³ (cf. the examples given in Table 6).

21. Given that the only existing dictionary of the Batsbi language (Kadagiže / Kadagiže 1984) can in no way claim to be exhaustive, every recorded word that has not been attested so far must be taken in account in this connection. This is true both for Georgian loans such as *arēnd-* 'security, pledge (given in lending a flat)' < Georgian *arenda* 'rent' (but used as an equivalent of Georgian *girao* 'security, deposit') or *simeyrtql-* 'strawberry' (if < Georgian *z(g)martl-i* 'medlar'), but also for other hitherto undocumented lexemes such as *marduḡ* 'long special staff used in spinning; distaff', *čečḡ-* 'male calf' (≈ Georg. *mozveri*; cf. Kadagiže/Kadagiže 1984: s.v. *šo*² 'pšavi'), or *kakan* 'spring wool' (≈ Georg. 'risvi').

22. Cf. Schulze (1982: 148 with fn. 217) for a survey of the verbs in question. The numeral *bip* 'four' may be added to the list.

23. Cf. Schulze (1994: 474) for these and other "auxiliaries" appearing in Udi.

Table 6.

<i>zom-baksun</i> 'to learn'	<i>azad-baksun</i> 'become free'	<i>kaç-esun</i> 'be slaughtered'	<i>kał-esun</i> 'be called, be read'
<i>zom-besun</i> 'to teach'	<i>azad-besun</i> 'make free'	<i>kaç-pesun</i> 'slay, kill'	<i>kał-pesun</i> 'call, read'

Table 7.

<i>pe-zu</i> 'I said'	<i>kaç-pesun</i> 'to kill'	<i>kał-ḡun-pe</i> 'they called'
<i>uḡa-z</i> 'I shall say'	<i>kaç-ḡun-exay</i> 'they used to kill'	<i>kaç-kał-ḡun-i</i> 'they killed'
		<i>kał-exa</i> '(they) read, call'

In the formation of TAM forms, *pesun* shows remarkable suppletivism. Cf. the following examples taken from our recordings which also exhibit the variation caused by the positioning of clitic personal markers (*zu/z* 'I'; *ḡun* 'they'; cf. Table 7).

The positioning of clitic elements is not only triggered by the elements of verbal lexemes though. Within sentences, they are regularly placed after stressed elements in focus position as example (1) shows.

- (1) *raste te-ne-bu kał-pesun beš muz-in ḡürḡi*
 as not-it-is reading-saying our language-with Georgian
muḡ-in-al-ḡun kał-exa
 language-with-also-they reading-say
 'As there is no reading in our language, (it is) in the Georgian language as well (that) they read.'

Note that some of the clitic person markers are identical in form with the corresponding personal pronouns which, however, are fully stressed forms themselves; cf. *zu* 'I' in example (2).

- (2) *udi muz-in azbar zom-ne-baksa, zom-zu-bsa, zu*
 Udi language-with poem teaching-she-gets teaching-me-do me
zom-besa
 teaching-do
 'She learns a poem in the Udi language, I teach her, me, (I) teach her.'

On the basis of the material now recorded, which comprises dialogues and other text sorts that were not available for linguistic analysis before,²⁴ we hope to contribute new aspects to the discussion on these elements too, esp. on the question to

24. The most voluminous text specimen of Udi published is the translation of the four gospels accomplished by the Bežanov brothers in 1901; cf. Bežanov/Bežanov (1901) and Schulze (2001).

what extent the system is influenced by the status of endangerment the language is in.²⁵

2.2 Actant marking, ergativity and sentence structure

2.2.1 *Svan*

Among the three languages under investigation, Svan is the least peculiar with respect to actant marking and relational typology, given that the rules it uses agree with those met with in its sister-language, Georgian, which is surely the best known language of the region and has been the object of many studies. Nevertheless the system must be styled typologically remarkable as it comprises a threefold split distinguishing a nominative-dative, an ergative-absolutive, and a dative-nominative subsystem of subject (S) and direct-object (DO) marking with transitive verbs, depending on the TAM category of the finite verb. Of the three subsystems, only the latter one (the "perfect" subsystem) implies a special ("inverse") concord in verbal forms; in the "present" and the "aorist" subsystems, the concord is the same. In all subsystems, it is primarily the subject person (or, rather, the agent) which is marked in the verb; direct objects (patients) are only marked when they are 1st or 2nd persons (while indirect objects are marked for all persons). The interplay of cases and personal markers involved can be illustrated with examples (3) and (4) taken from our recordings.

- (3) a. (nom.-)dative *wožax-s* *xw-aṭwilda-d* *eḡa-s*
 (imperfect) dowry-DO:DAT:SG we-used.to.call-PL it-DO:DAT:SG
 'We used to call it a *wožax* (dowry).'
 b. erg.-abs. *ḡwelapris wožax-i* *kala-m-ēm*
 (aorist) of.all.kinds dowry:DO:ABS:SG-too down-me-they.gave
mišgu di-d *i mu-d*
 my mother-S:ERG:SG and father-S:ERG:SG
 And my mother and father gave me dowry of all kinds.'
- (4) a. (nom.-)dative *ečēču läčwār-s* *ləmdagwrin-x*,
 (impf. infer.) there deer-DO:DAT:PL used.to.kill.INFER-they
 'There they (are said to have been) used to kill deer,
 b. dat.-nom. *baba-s* *otdagra läčw*
 (perfect) uncle-S:DAT:SG did.kill deer:DO:NOM:SG
 (my) uncle (is said to have) killed (a) deer (too).'

A peculiar difference between Svan and Georgian can be seen in forms such as *ləmdagwrinx* in example (4a) above which represents an inferential imperfect, a

25. The positioning of Udi clitics has been the object of a series of studies by Alice C. Harris (1997, 2000, 2002).

category not existing in the latter language. Both the formation of this category (which is obviously noun-based²⁶) and the functional load of the inferential tenses of Svan in general²⁷ deserve further investigation which can now be built upon a large amount of narratives collected in audio-visual form.

2.2.2 Tsova-Tush (Batsbi)

In comparison with Svan (and Georgian), the actant marking of Batsbi seems to be more regular in that the system of this language is basically ergative, the marking of subjects of intransitive verbs and of direct objects of transitive verbs being identical both as to the (absolutive) case used and to the (class) concord applied, and there is no tense split. There is a peculiarity, however, which has been a matter of debate in the literature, viz. the fact that a certain amount of intransitive verbs take their subject in the ergative instead of the absolutive case if it is represented by a 1st or 2nd person and there is a certain degree of “agentivity” implied. The main question whether this “variable marking” of intransitive subjects is a moribund feature of Batsbi or not²⁸ can now be investigated for the first time on the basis of a larger set of naturally produced texts.²⁹ To illustrate the phenomenon, the sentence displayed with its Georgian equivalent in example (5), with two intransitive (*ču-xa* ‘to sit down’ and *e-d-ağ-ar* ‘to sit’) and one transitive verb (*am-d-ar* ‘to learn, study’), all showing ergative subject reference, may suffice for the time being.³⁰

- (5) a. *upro čuxu'erā-s gaḳūytl-i*
upro v̄ždebodi gaḳvetilebs
 rather sit.down:IMPF-me:ERG lesson-abs:pl
ām-y-orā-s
v̄ščavlobdi
 learn-them:IV-impf-me:ERG
 ‘I rather used to sit down (intentionally) (and) study lessons,

26. Cf. Topuria (1931/1967: 131ff.) for the formation of the forms in the different dialects.

27. Cf. Harris (1985: Ch. 13) and Sumbatova (1999) for earlier work on this topic.

28. Cf. Holisky (1987: 103ff.) for the most detailed investigation of this topic which led to the establishment of six classes of intransitive verbs: only nominative marking, “variable” marking, only ergative marking with 1st and 2nd person subjects, ergative marking with all three persons, only non-person subjects, and dative subjects (for which see below).

29. The investigation by Holisky (1987) was mostly based on an elicitation undertaken with one “main consultant” (ib., 108, n. 4).

30. The sentence is taken from a personal narrative by a 67 year old female speaker from Zemo Alvani. The transcription and Georgian translation were provided by B. Shavkhelishvili. Note the use of the Georgian loans *upro* ‘more, rather’, *gaḳūytl-i* (abs.pl.) ‘lesson’ (Georgian *gaḳvetili*), and *xōlme* ‘usually’ (Georgian *xolme*).

- b. *buschā e-y-āgrā-s xōlme*
mteli.game vižeki xolme
 all.night sit-II-sit-impf-me:ERG usually
 all night I used to sit (intentionally) (like this).’

The example at the same time shows that the Batsbi concord system is more complicated than that of the Kartvelian languages as it combines the class concord valid for direct objects of transitive verbs and subjects of intransitive verbs with a person concord to be applied to 1st and 2nd person subjects of both transitive and intransitive verbs, with different markers for the ergative and absolutive. The interplay of subject and object markers involved is clearly displayed in examples (6) and (7):

- (6) a. cl.III-1st person
d-ečo-s axḳarma-k ḥal°
 it:III-spin-me:ERG hatchel-on upon
 ‘I (ERG) am spinning ‘it’ (= something, IIIrd cl.) on the hatchel.’
 b. cl.IV-1st person
keč ḥal-y-ečo-s-ē ...
 wool up-it:IV-spin-me:ERG-and ...
 ‘I (ERG) am spinning up wool (IVth cl.) and ...’
 c. cl.V-1st person
equyn partan b-eçe-s tagban
 from.this wool-flock it:V-must-me:ERG to make
 ‘From this I (ERG) must make a wool-flock (Vth cl.).’
 (7) a. cl.III-1st ps.sg.
žeketi d-epco-s
 jackets them:III-knit-me:ERG
 ‘I (ERG) knit jackets (IIIrd cl., pl.).’
 b. cl.III-1st ps.pl.
čxindri d-epco-tx
 socks them:III-knit-we:ERG
 ‘We (ERG) knit socks (IIIrd cl., pl.).’

With intransitive verbs, this system leads to a twofold marking of the primary (subject) actant; cf. Table 8 showing this effect in the 1st and 2nd person forms of the copula (note the difference of the absolutive person markers *-s°* and *-tx°*, i.e. *-sō* and *-txō*, vs. the ergative markers *-s* and *-tx* we have seen in the examples above):

Table 8.

<i>v-a-s°</i>	<i>y-a-s°</i>	<i>v-a-ḥ°</i>	<i>y-a-ḥ°</i>
‘I (masc.) am’	‘I (fem.) am’	‘you (sg. masc.) are’	‘you (sg. fem.) are’
<i>b-a-tx°</i>	<i>d-a-tx°</i>	<i>b-a-yš</i>	<i>d-a-yš</i>
‘we (masc.) are’	‘we (fem.) are’	‘you (pl. masc.) are’	‘you (pl. fem.) are’

Note that as in the Kartvelian languages, there is a minor subgroup of intransitive verbs (mostly *verba sentiendi*)³¹ with dative “subjects” in Batsbi; different from Kartvelian, these show no marking in the verb at all, however, concord being restricted to the class of the absolutive actant. Cp., e.g., *yeç so* ‘I (*so*, dat.) love you (*y-*, 2nd class=fem.)’ vs. Georgian *miqvarxar* with 1st person dative marking (*mi-*) alongside the 2nd person “subject” marker (*-x-*), lit. something like ‘you are beloved to me’, or *vāpçī hō* ‘do you (*ho*, dat.) know him (*v-*, 1st class = masc.)’. On the basis of several hours of dialogue material we have recorded now, we expect to have sufficient material for a thorough reinvestigation of the problems involved.

2.2.3 Udi

As in the Kartvelian languages, the case marking of primary actants in Udi has three subsystems which, however, do not depend on the TAM categories of transitive verbs. Instead, the marking of subjects is triggered by the verb class itself, the basic scheme being clearly ergative again: Transitive verbs require their subject in the ergative case throughout, while the subject of most intransitive verbs is in the absolutive. The third subsystem of Udi is constituted by *verba sentiendi* whose subject (the percipient / experiencer) is underlyingly dative; in present day speech, this subsystem seems to have got lost, the “dative” marking of the subject being restricted to the special (“dative”) personal concord markers still used in these cases.³² It is important to note in this respect that different from the other languages under investigation here, concord in Udi is confined to subjects. The most remarkable difference as against both Kartvelian and Batsbi lies in the marking of direct objects, however: The direct object of transitive and “inverse” (i.e. dative subject) verbs can appear both in the absolutive and in the dative case, depending on its definiteness,³³ so that many verbs can have two datives (one marking the direct and one, an indirect object) at the same time. This picture, which at first glance reminds of the object marking of Georgian or Svan transitives in the “present system”, becomes even more complicated as the dative case has at least two concurrent morphological shapes in Udi the syntactical distribution of which is

31. According to Holisky (1987:130), this group comprises “circa 33” verbs “of perception, cognition, and emotion”.

32. Cf. Harris (2002:256) for a discussion of the processes involved, and Schulze (2005a:58f.) who warns against taking the material provided by Schiefner (1863) too seriously.

33. Cf. Harris (2002:244ff.) for a detailed analysis of the rules applying, and Schulze (2005b:254).

not easy to establish.³⁴ For an illustration of the mechanisms involved cf. examples (8) to (10).

- (8) a. (erg.)-dat. *yax nu kaçkal-çun-i*
transitive us:DAT not kill-they-would
‘... (so that) they would not kill us.’
b. erg.-abs. *eça ça-çun-bi me xinär-muğ-on?*
transitive what:ABS would-they-do these girl-PL-ERG
‘What would these girls do?’
- (9) a. (dat.)-dat. *te muz-ix aba-çò-bak-i*
vb.sent. this language-DAT knowing-they:DAT-be-would
‘... (that) they would know this language (DAT)’
b. (dat.)-abs. *gürži muz aba-çò-bak-i*
vb.sent. Georgian language:ABS knowing-they:DAT-be-would
‘... (that) they would know the Georgian language (ABS)’
- (10) abs. *me udi-ux çya-çun-bake*
intransitive this Udi.people-PL:ABS there-they-were
‘These Udi people were there.’

2.2.4 Cross-linguistic interferences?

With their peculiarities outlined above, both Udi and Batsbi deviate to a considerable extent from the East-Caucasian prototype such as represented, e.g., in Avar, the *lingua franca* of Daghestan, which is likely to have been genuinely of the ergative-absolutive type with concord restricted to the nominal class of “absolutive” actants. Given that the application of personal subject marking (as against a class marking of “absolutive” actants) makes the Batsbi system more similar to the Kartvelian type which has a subject person marking throughout, and given that the use of the dative case for direct objects renders the Udi system more similar to the Kartvelian type with its (nominative-)dative subsystem, the question imposes itself whether Georgian might have exerted some influence here. While this may well be argued for in the case of Batsbi, the case of Udi is much less clear. First, we must consider that Udi-Georgian contacts have been restricted to the Oktomberi population in the recent past; the features outlined above are not restricted to this variety of the language, however, but must have been transferred to Oktomberi from Azerbaijan as older documents prove. On the other hand, we can prove now that the “Georgian-like” use of the dative case must have developed in Udi much

34. Cf. Tandaschwili (2002 and 2003) for a study of the Udi datives based on the gospel texts (Bežanov/Bežanov 1901). According to W. Schulze (personal communication of Dec. 13, 2005), the so-called “dative II” (ending in *-x*) is used for directed objects and in an allative function in Vartashen Udi, while the so-called “dative I” (ending in a vowel) is used for indirect objects (in Nidj Udi, the “dative II” has been given up).

earlier than the 19th century when the first records of this language were written down, given that it is already present in the texts of the so-called Caucasian “Albanians”, the presumptive ancestors of the Udi people in the Middle Ages, which are the object of another project we are running at present.³⁵ It is possible, then, that in those times there were much closer contacts between “Albanians” and Georgians which might have brought about linguistic interferences of the type assumed here. This cannot be proven yet, however, and at least Armenian and (North West) Middle Iranian languages remain valid candidates, too, for the areal factors that can have influenced the development of Udi in the way indicated.³⁶

3. Determining linguistic parameters of language endangerment

3.1 Some preliminaries

In determining the endangerment of languages, it is mostly sociological parameters such as a steadily decreasing number of speakers, the distribution among age groups, or the alphabetization rate that are taken into account.³⁷ The Caucasus is a good example to show that the number of speakers can hardly be decisive in this respect, considering that there is no indication whatsoever that the small speaker communities of languages such as Abaza, Bezhta, or Rutul were ever considerably larger than they are today; in other words, the Caucasus gives good reason to believe that communities of less than 1000 speakers can keep intact for centuries (if not millennia). How, then, can we be sure that the languages under investigation in our project are endangered? It is true, of course, that for Svan, Batsbi, and Udi, too, we had to rely upon sociological parameters of the given type in the beginning, comparing, e.g., demographic figures of the 19th and 20th centuries.

35. The “Albanian” material concealed in two palimpsest manuscripts of St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mt. Sinai are at present being prepared for a *editio princeps* by a project team consisting of Zaza Aleksisze (Tbilisi), Jean-Pierre Mahé (Paris), Manana Tandaschwili (Frankfurt), Wolfgang Schulze (Munich) and the present author. For preliminary details cf. <http://armazi.uni-frankfurt.de/armaz3.htm>.

36. Only Azeri-Turkic influence can be ruled out for those developments that are already accounted for in the “Albanian” documents of the early Middle Ages, given that there is no indication whatsoever for Oghuz speaking Turkic tribes being present in the area during the centuries in question.

37. Literature as to this and related topics is abundant; cf., e.g., the comprehensive bibliography provided by Tasaku Tsunoda in <http://www.tooyoo.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/BibLE/>. The present paper does not aim at discussing the many general issues involved but simply intends to provide a case study for languages that have hitherto not been investigated in this respect.

In the course of our project, however, it has become clear that some salient indications of endangerment can be detected in the languages to be documented themselves.

Let us first consider the following preliminaries which are likely to be generally valid:

- language endangerment presupposes the pressure of at least one dominant language, whatever the reasons of the dominance may be (oppression, political superiority, literacy, higher prestige);
- language death, as the final effect of language endangerment, presupposes language shift, i.e., abandoning one language for another;
- language shift, as the prestage of language death, presupposes a period of increasing code switching in the use of the language being abandoned.

3.1.1 *The Caucasian setting*

In the present-day Caucasus, the situation is especially complex as far as dominant languages are concerned. Due to the historical conditions of the past centuries, nearly all minor languages are dominated by more than just one *lingua franca*. In the case of Svan, Georgian is surely the primary dominant language today, but Russian cannot yet be neglected although its influence is steadily decreasing in Svanetia as elsewhere in post-Soviet Georgia. In the case of Batsbi, we have to deal with Georgian and Russian in quite the same distribution, too, but there may as well be some impact of the closely related Chechen language. As to Udi, the picture is quite different in Oktomberi and the Azerbaijan villages: While Azeri Turkic is surely prevalent as the dominant language in the latter, this role has been taken over by Georgian in the former. In Azerbaijan, esp. in Nidj, Armenian may still be a noteworthy factor, and Russian keeps being used all over the region.

The picture becomes yet a bit more complex if we consider that we are hardly dealing with plain standard languages when speaking of dominant *linguae francae* here. Thus, we have to take into account that the dominant contact language Svan speakers will be used to is not standard Georgian (as spoken in and around Tbilisi) but Imeretian, a western dialect. In a similar way, the contact language of Batsbi speakers living in Zemo Alvani is the Tushian dialect of Georgian,³⁸ and the Udi people of Oktomberi live in an environment dominated by the Kakhétian dialect of Georgian.

38. This is indicated, e.g., by loans such as *mōndvi* (abs.pl.) “sisters-in-law” clearly reflecting the Tushian term *mondavī* listed in Xubuṭia (1969: 121); the Batsbi word is missing as a lemma in Kadagizē/Kadagizē (1984) but appears in a sample sentence under *qahol* ‘bitterness’ (ib., 653).

3.1.2 Theoretical expectations

All these observations must be kept in mind when looking for indications of a language shift process going on, for they are crucial with respect to the following theoretical expectations:

- The existence of a dominant language will be recognizable by peculiar “traces” it leaves in the endangered language (interferences of certain types);
- different dominant languages leave different traces;
- different types of interferences indicate different levels of endangerment.

The Caucasian languages under investigation in our project clearly show that these assumptions are right. At the same time, they enable us to define more precisely what types of interferences we must envisage when trying to determine the degree of endangerment of a given language with linguistic means.

3.2 The Batsbi case

There can hardly be any doubt that Batsbi is an endangered language if we consider its sociolinguistic setting alone. Only people older than 50 years can be expected to have a perfect competence of the language today, their number hardly exceeding 1000 persons; younger adults may still understand it and be able to speak it, but normally they refuse to do so, mostly because their lexical competence is steadily decreasing. There are probably no children, at least younger ones, who understand or use the language today, given that school education has always been in Georgian in the region and, subsequently, Georgian has developed into the main means of communication even within the families.³⁹ It is hardly surprising under these conditions that the endangerment of the Tsova Tush language is thematized by speakers themselves; cp. the appendix given below which displays a 12-verse poem by David Arindauli on this subject.⁴⁰

3.2.1

If we had to rely upon purely linguistic data in determining the degree of endangerment for Batsbi, we would first note that the speech of nearly all native speakers of Batsbi we have recorded is largely interspersed with Georgian nouns which have been adapted to the sound system of Batsbi to different extents. While some of them have remained nearly intact such as the fix phrase *sabčota dro* ‘Soviet times’

39. Cf. Holisky/Gagua (1994: 149) for a similar estimation.

40. The poem, read by L. Bartishvili from a hand-written copy, was recorded in Dec. 2004 in Zemo Alvani by B. Shavkhelishvili who also provided the transcription and a Georgian translation.

(Georgian *sabčota dro*, lit. ‘councils’ time’) or lost only word final vowels such as *gazapxul* ‘spring time’ (Georgian nom.sg. *gazapxuli*), *vir* ‘donkey’ (Georgian *vir*), or *sakm* ‘matter, thing’ (Georgian *sakme*),⁴¹ others were affected by more rigid changes such as, e.g., *memcxor* ‘shepherd’ (Georgian *mecxvare*) or *eydgle* ‘place’ (Georgian *adgili*). The same holds true for the subcategory of verbal nouns; cf., e.g., *gansxvaveb* ‘difference’ (Georgian *gansxvaveba*), *koneb* ‘property’ (Georgian *koneba*), *cxovrba* ‘living, life’ (Georgian *cxovreba*), or *qarulob* ‘safeguarding’ (Georgian *qarauloba*). The different degrees of adaptation may well be taken to indicate that the contacts between Batsbi and Georgian must have extended over a larger period of time, younger loans being less affected than older ones. And indeed, we can prove that the contacts must have continued for centuries, given that there are several loans from Old (5th–12th cc.) or Middle Georgian times (12th–18th cc.) the “models” of which are no longer in use in Modern Georgian; cf., e.g., *gepse* ‘week’ (Old Georgian *msgepsi*), *aqšba* ‘Easter’ (Old Georgian *ağvseba-*), or *katat* ‘July’ (Late Middle Georgian *mḡata tve*, lit. ‘haycrops’ month’).⁴²

3.2.2

Georgian loanwords in Batsbi are not restricted to plain nouns though, adjectives being as easily discoverable, with the same degrees of phonetic adaptation. Cp., e.g., *sasargeblo* ‘useful’ (Georgian *sasargeblo*), *znel* ‘difficult’ (Georgian *zneli*), *tavisupal* ‘free’ (Georgian *tavisupali*), *momgebian* ‘dedicated’ (Georgian *momgebiani*), *saḡasuxisgebel* ‘responsible’ (Georgian *saḡasuxismgeblo*)⁴³, or *saucō* ‘strange’ (Georgian *saucōo*, lit. ‘belonging to strangers’). In many cases, even verbs seem to have been borrowed from Georgian; cp., e.g., *miḡebadyo* ‘is gained’ (Georgian *miḡeba-* ‘to gain’), *gamartdienč* ‘erected’ (Georgian *gamartva-* ‘to erect’); *daḡagacuradyo* ‘they sieve’ (Georgian *gacurva-* ‘to sieve’), *daboḡrebadyayln* ‘made sour’ (Georgian dial. *daboḡreba-* ‘to make sour’), or *daḡdaxašlebal* ‘can be infected’ (Georgian *daxašleba-* ‘to infect’). It is easy to see, however, that all these forms are built not on finite forms but on denominal formations of Georgian, the underlying category being the adverbial case (in *-ad*) of the so-called “masdars” (verbal nouns) indicated in the parentheses above.⁴⁴ The only possible exception we have found so far is *šezlebal* ‘it is possible’ if this reflects Georgian (finite) *šezleba* ‘id.’, not the masdar *šezleba* ‘ability, to be able’.

41. Cf. Holisky/Gagua (1994: 155f.) for the reduction of word final vowels in Batsbi.

42. Cf. Črelašvili (1981) for a first attempt to determine such loans.

43. Possibly contaminated with Georgian *paḡsuxismgebel-i* ‘id.’

44. Cf. Holisky/Gagua (1994: 185) for a similar analysis.

3.2.3

It is true that these loans can in no way be taken to indicate the degree of endangerment of the Batsbi language – they are mere indications of a long-lasting cultural dominance of a neighbouring language, Georgian, just as many of the English equivalents of the words quoted are of Romance origin, without suggesting that English might be endangered today (cf., e.g., *matter*, *place*, *difference*, or *property*). The same holds true for the large amount of Georgian adverbials we meet with in Batsbi speech such as, e.g., *saertot* ‘commonly, unifiedly’ (Georgian *saertod*), *spécialurat* ‘especially’ (Georgian *spécialurad*), *aucileblat* ‘necessarily’ (Georgian *aucileblad*), *magalitat* ‘for example’ (Georgian *magalitat*), *çinaşcar* ‘before’ (Georgian ‘id.’), *daaxloebit* ‘approximately’ (Georgian ‘id.’), *manamdis* ‘meanwhile, so long’ (Georgian ‘id.’), and *bolos* ‘finally’ (Georgian ‘id.’; note that the devoicing of *-d* in word final position is a feature of spoken Georgian itself, not of Batsbi). And in quite the same way as we can speak of *exceptional cases* in Romance English, Batsbi borrowed the Georgian phrase *gamonaklisi šemtxveva* to form the locative adverb *gamonaklis šemtxveve*⁴⁵ ‘in an exceptional case’.

A more remarkable feature in this respect is the structure of numerals. Both Batsbi and Georgian have an underlying vigesimal system, which is typical for the Caucasus area. None of the basic numerals appear to be similar enough to suggest any genetic relationship though; cf., e.g., Batsbi *bar:l*: ‘eight’ vs. Georgian *rva*, or *pxi* ‘five’ vs. Georgian *xuti*. Different from Georgian, the Batsbi word for ‘hundred’ still reveals its vigesimal structure, *pxauztq* being easily analyzable as ‘five (times) twenty’; in Georgian, however, the vigesimal structure ends with 80 (*otxmoci*, lit. ‘four times twenty’) while ‘hundred’ is represented by an opaque formation, *asi*, thus announcing a switch from the vigesimal to a decimal system. Nevertheless, the Georgian system proves to be dominant over the Batsbi one, viz. in higher numbers. In our recordings, no speaker (advertedly or inadvertedly) tried to denote numbers higher than hundred with Batsbi elements proper. Instead, Georgian numbers were used in all these cases, leading to hybrid formations such as *atas-cxraas-tqan-vor:l*: meaning ‘1927’, with *atas-* ‘1000’ and *cxraas-* ‘900’ being unaltered Georgian forms while *tqan-* ‘20’ and *vor:l*: ‘seven’ are purely Batsbi numerals. This need not mean that it would be impossible to denote numbers higher than 100 with Batsbi elements;⁴⁵ it must mean, however, that whenever such numbers occur in discourse, Batsbi speakers are speaking Georgian, not Batsbi. In other words, the use of higher numbers is likely to be restricted to text sorts which are already occupied by Georgian with native speakers of the Batsbi language. This, by the way, is quite different from the conditions under which Georgians tend to use

45. Cf. Dešeriev (1967:236) for a survey of the rules to be applied.

Russian numerals even today, viz. in counting money and memorizing telephone numbers; here, the amount of the number in question plays no role whatsoever.

3.2.4

Another type of words that deserves our attention here is indeclinable elements such as conjunctions, particles, and interjections. As a matter of fact, the Batsbi speech of today is interspersed with elements of these types that have clearly been taken over from Georgian. Cf., e.g., *sanam* ‘until’ (Georgian *sanam* ‘id.’), *mainc* ‘at least’ (Georgian ‘id.’), or *magramien* ‘but’ (Georgian *magram* ‘id.’), the latter also appearing unaltered as *magram*, but also *rasačvirvelia* ‘of course’ (Georgian *rasačvirvelia* ‘id.’) or *eseigi* ‘that is’ (Georgian *ese igi* ‘id.’). It is especially this sort of discourse-structuring particles which strongly suggests that Georgian is the primary language used by all native speakers of Batsbi today.

3.2.5

The most striking indication of Georgian being the primary means of communication of Batsbi speakers even when talking with each other, can be seen in instances of inadverted code switching occurring by and large in our recordings. Cf., e.g., example (11a) taken from an account of the history of the Tushian region.⁴⁶

- (11) a. *aïlnā-s me maš alzaⁿ esēgā yağorēn*
 said-I that then Alazani from.here was.flowing
 ‘I said that then the Alazani river was flowing from here.
ak iğo didi čala
 here was big forest
 (There) was a big forest here,
ramdenime aseulebi çlebis zalian skeli muxebi
 several hundreds of.years very thick oaks
 very thick oaks of several hundreds of years.
equiⁿ dağgamindvrebadaⁿ doldaliⁿ bacbi
 this to.change.into.field they.began Batsbi
 The Batsbi (people) began to change this into field(s).’

There is a clear difference here between a Georgian element that has been fit into a Batsbi sentence (*maš* ‘then’) or adapted to Batsbi morphology (*dağgamindvrebadaⁿ* ‘to change into a field’, from the Georgian denominal verb *ga-mindvr-ebad*, from *mindor-i* ‘field’), and the plain Georgian clause inserted into the Batsbi context; cf. the whole utterance contrasted with its Georgian translation in example (11b).

46. From a recording undertaken by B. Shavkhelishvili in Dec. 2004; the male speaker was 89 year old then.

- (11) b. *aɪɫnās me, maš alzaⁿ esēgā yağorēn*
 Georgian: *vtkvi, rom maš alazani akedan modiodao,*
 said-I that then Alazani from.here was.running
 'I said that then the Alazani (river) was running from here,
ak iğo didi çala,
ak iğo didi çala,
 here was big forest
 there was a big forest here,
ramdenime aseulebi çlebis zalian skeli muxebi,
ramdenime aseulebi çlebis zalian skeli muxebi,
 several hundreds of.years very thick oaks
 very thick oaks of several hundreds of years.
equiⁿ dahgamindvrebadaⁿ doldaliⁿ bacbi...
amis mindvrad.kceva daiçqes tuşebma...
 this into.field.to.change they.began Tushians...
 the Tushians began to change this into field(s).'

It is clear that such an instance of code switching could not be argued with if it were restricted to individual speakers; in this case, it would just be an indication of a certain person's prevalence for Georgian. On the basis of our recordings, there is good reason to believe, however, that there are no more Batsbi speakers today who could avoid switching to Georgian at least occasionally.

3.3 The Svan case

In the case of Svan it is much less evident from the sociolinguistic parameters that it must be regarded as endangered, taking into account that there may still be some 50,000 speakers of all ages alive in Georgia. It must be stated though that Svan, just like Batsbi, was never used in school education and that the language did not develop a literary standard either. So it cannot be a surprise that the picture of spoken Svan our recordings provide is very similar to that of Batsbi, yielding the same conclusions.

3.3.1

In Svan, too, we find lots of nouns, adjectives and adverbs that have been borrowed from Georgian, either in recent times or as early as the Old Georgian period, with more or less visible phonetic adaptations, and here, too, this includes many verbal nouns; and it is hardly surprising that this involves the same Georgian models as those we have met with in Batsbi. Cf., e.g., *koneba* 'property' (Georgian 'id.'). *qarlob* 'safeguarding' (Georgian *qarauloba*), *mdgomareoba* 'state' (Georgian 'id.'). *sabral* 'poor' (Georgian *sabralo*), *saertod* 'commonly' (Georgian 'id.'). and maybe even *ägi* 'place' (Georgian *adgili*, cp. Batsbi *eydgle*). What is

more important, we are observing that as in Batsbi, there is a clear tendency to use Georgian numerals whenever higher numbers are implied. In example (12a) taken from a historical narrative, the year 1873 is denominated by the hybrid formation *atasiarāširišgwidyešdisēmi* which contains Georgian *atasi* 'thousand' alongside the plain Svan elements *arāšir* 'eight-hundred' (cp. Georgian *rva-asi*), *išgwidyešd* 'seventy' (lit. 'seven-ten', cp. Georgian vigesimal *samocdaati*, lit. 'three-[times]-twenty-and-ten'), and *sēm-* 'three' (cp. Georgian *sami*); from the Svan point of view, this is the maximum of "authenticity" possible as an inherited equivalent of Georgian *atasi* "thousand", lit. "ten-hundred", does not exist in this language.⁴⁷

- (12) a. *atasi-ar-āšir-i-išgwid-yešd-i-sēmi zäyži ädbinān ala*
 1000-8-100-and-7-10-and-3 year-on began that
 Georgian *atas-rva-as-sam-oc-da-ca-meṭ çels daiçqo es*
 1000-8-100-3. × -20-and-10.3-more in.year began that
 'In the year 1873, that began.'

In a similar context, another speaker shows much more confusion as to the use of Georgian and Svan numerals, however, and it will be clear from her attempt to correct herself that the former must be much more familiar to her than the latter, especially when talking about dates (example (12b); here again, Georgian elements are printed in bold letters).⁴⁸

- (12) b. *atas-cxras-otx-m-oc-da-at çel-ši, zaysa çonqwadd*
 1000-9.100-4- × -20-and-10 year-in in-year we.went.down
bolnis-i rayon-te.
 Bolnisi-of district-to
 Georgian *atas-cxra-as-otx-m-oc-da-at çelši, çels çamovedit*
 1000-9-100-4- × -20-and-10 year-in in-year we.went.down
bolnis-is raion-ši.
 Bolnisi-of district-in
 'In the year 1990, in (that) year we moved down into the district of Bolnisi.
otx-m-oc-da-at zay-xenka çxara-ešd... atas-cxras...
 4- × -20-and-10 year-from 9-10 1000-9.100
otx-m-oc-da-ati çli-dan otx-m-oc-da-at... atas-cxr-aas...
 4- × -20-and-10 year-from 4- × -20-and-10 1000-9.100
 From the year 90 on, 90... 1900...

47. The (male) speaker (of the Upper Bal dialect) is about 80 years old.

48. The (female) speaker (of the Cholur dialect) is about 60 years old.

imži xakwčer mikwens ale,
 how should I.say that
rogor unda metkva es
 how must I.say that
 how am I to say that,
čxara-ešd zay-nğwe xwarid bolnis-i rayon-isa.
 9-10 year-from.on we.are Bolnisi-of district-in
otx-m-oc-da-ati çli-dan vart bolnis-is raion-ši.
 4-×-20-and-10 year-from we.are Bolnisi-of district-in
 from the year 90 on we have been in the district of Bolnisi.’

3.3.2

As in Batsbi, there is also a considerable amount of discourse-structuring particles, conjunctions and interjections of Georgian origin used by the Svan speakers in our recordings, thus indicating the same prevalence of Georgian in their everyday speech. Cf., e.g., *ese igi* ‘that is’ (Georgian ‘id.’), *ra tkma unda* ‘of course’ (Georgian ‘id.’, lit. ‘what need be said’), *albat* ‘perhaps’ (Georgian ‘id.’), *ubralod* ‘simply’ (Georgian ‘id.’), or the excessively used gap filler *ho da*, lit. ‘yes, and ...’ (Georgian ‘id.’). In comparison with Batsbi, the phenomenon of sentence-internal code-switching seems to be even more typical for Svan, at least as far as our recordings with speakers from the Kodori region are concerned. This may well be due to the fact that Georgian and Svan are genetically related and their grammars match to a considerable extent.

3.3.2.1 Let us first consider the case of a relatively young male speaker who studies in the capital, Tbilisi. It is clear that talking about this latter fact, he has to adapt special Georgian terms we cannot expect to exist in the Svan language; cf. his self-introduction in example (13).

- (13) *xwitwri tbilisi-s, tbilis-is saxelmçipo universiṭeṭ-s,*
 I.study Tbilisi-in Tbilisi-of State- University-in
 Georgian *vščavlob tbilis-ši, tbilis-is saxelmçipo universiṭeṭ-ši,*
 I.study Tbilisi-in Tbilisi-of State- University-in
 ‘I study in Tbilisi, in the State University of Tbilisi,
saertašoriso samartal-ži, pīrvel ḱurs-ži.
 international law-on first course-on
saertašoriso samartal-ze, pīrvel ḱurs-ze.
 international law-on first course-on
 “on” international law, “on” the first “course”’

As a matter of fact, there are but very few Svan elements proper in this sentence, viz. the finite verb, *xwitwri* ‘I study’, and the case endings and postpositions -s (dat./loc.) and -ži (‘on’).

3.3.2.2 In a second sentence taken from this speaker’s self-report, we even meet with a finite verbal form that is not Svan but Georgian; cf. example (14).

- (14) *ešd-oxwišd lə-zäy xwäsw ečka, lašyäl-te*
 10-5 with-year I.was then war-in
monačileoba miwiğe.
 participation I.took
 Georgian *t-xut-meṭi çl-is viqavi mašin, om-ši rom*
 10-5-more year-of I.was then war-in when
monačileoba miviğe.
 participation I.took
 ‘I was fifteen years old then, (when) I participated in the war.’

It is clear that we have special conditions here, given that the verb in question, Georgian *miviğe* (lit. ‘I took’) pertains to an idiomatic phrase dominated by *monačileoba*, a verbal abstract noun meaning ‘participation’ (lit. ‘being a participant’). Thus we may assume that the occurrence of the finite Georgian verb in the Svan sentence was somehow “triggered” by the preceding noun. On the other hand, it must be taken into account that the use of a Georgian finite verbal form in a Svan sentence is not as remarkable as it would be in a Batsbi context, given that the conjugation systems of the two Kartvelian languages agree to a large extent in their structure. To be sure, however, there is not a single (inherited) verbal form that would be identical in the two languages.

3.3.2.3 As our recordings show, this type of code switching is not restricted to younger people. From the speech of a ca. 50 year old woman, a school teacher (of Georgian), we may quote some similar cases. Her speech, too, is interspersed with nominal elements from Georgian, sometimes even with their case endings left intact; cf. example (15).

- (15) *mtel šwäniä saxel-it xwaṭuli zğad madloba-s*
 all Svanetia.of name-with I.say big gratitude-DAT
al xälx-s
 that people-to
 Georgian *mteli svanetis saxel-it veubnebi did madloba-s*
 all Svanetia.of name-with I.say big gratitude-DAT
am xälx-s.
 that people-to
 ‘In the name of all Svanetia, I say a big thank-you to that people.’

Note that *saxelit*, lit ‘with the name’, is the plain Georgian instrumental form of *saxel-i* ‘name’ whose Svan equivalent would be *žaxe*, and the Svan instrumental ending would be -šw, not -it. *madlobas*, the dative form of (Georgian) *madloba-*

‘thanks’, might contain both the Georgian and the Svan dative ending here, both being identical (-s). *xälxs* ‘to the people’, however, must be regarded as a Svan dative because it contains Georgian *xalk-* ‘people’ in an adapted form, with Georgian *a* umlauted to Svan *ä* under the influence of the Georgian nominative ending, -i, and then generalized throughout the Svan paradigm.

In the speech of the same speaker, we seem to find yet another type of code switching. Here the triggering element appears to be one of the discourse particles dealt with above, viz. *albat* ‘perhaps’; cf. example (16).

- (16) *ešgrix zayär i ala albat gawlenas moaxdens*
 pass years and this perhaps influence-DAT will.exert
momawal-žm-i.
 future-on-too
 Georgian *midis çlebi da es albat gavlenas moaxdens*
 pass years and this perhaps influence-DAT will.exert
momaval-ze-c.
 future-on-too
 ‘Years are passing and this will perhaps have some influence on the future, too.’

There may be some doubt as to this analysis though. If we consider that the word following the particle is a Georgian abstract noun again which forms a close idiomatic phrase with the finite verbal form *moaxdens* (in the sense of ‘will exert influence’), the type may well be the same as with the student’s ‘participation’. Note, however, that this speaker finishes her sentence in Svan again, with the postposition *-žm(n)* followed by *-i* ‘as well’.

3.3.2.4 That code switching from Svan to Georgian is not at all a matter of generations in Svan is proven by the speech of a ca. 80 year old man which exhibits some peculiar traits in this respect. Let us first consider the way how he integrates the Russian designation of an institution into his Svan narrative in example (17).⁴⁹

- (17) *mišgu muxbe plaṭon dom učitel’skaya-s arda ...*
 my brother Platon house of.teachers-in was
 Georgian *çemi zma plaṭoni maščavlebl-is saxl-ši iḡo ...*
 my brother Platon teachers-of house-in was
 ‘My brother Platon was in the House of Teachers ...’

Here, the foreign element, which consists of a Russian masculine noun in the nominative (*dom* ‘house’) plus an adjective incorrectly put in the feminine form (*učitel’skaya*, quasi Russian *učitel’skaya*, instead of the masculine nom.sg. *učitel’skiy*

49. The speaker is the same as the one who produced the numeral ‘1873’ dealt with above.

‘belonging to teachers’) is combined with the Svan ending of the dative-locative, -s, quite as *tbilisis* in the student’s speech (13) represents a Georgian nominative form (the name of the capital, *tbilisi*) connected with the Svan dative ending -s. In a similar way, the foreign name *adolp* (German *Adolf*, probably via Georgian *adolp-*) receives a ‘correct’ Svan ergative ending -d in example (18) (note that Svan *säčir* ‘necessary’ represents another Georgian word as a borrowing, *sačiro-*, with the same ‘umlaut’ as *xälx-* above):

- (18) *mare adolp-d ädbine, mäy möm x-adda säčir, eža.*
 but Adolf-ERG began what not to.him-was necessary that
 Georgian *magram adolp-ma daiçqo, rac ar h-konda sačiro is.*
 but Adolf-ERG began what not he-had necessary that
 ‘But Adolf (Hitler) began (that) what was not necessary for him.’

In another instance, however, the use of a Georgian word causes the attachment of a Georgian ending in the given context. Here, the ergative case of the agent is marked with Georgian *-ma*, not Svan *-d*, after the ‘enemy’ has been denoted by Georgian *mčer-*, not Svan *amaxw*:

- (19) *mčer-ma adolp čwadgär...*
 enemy-ERG Adolf.NOM killed
 Georgian *mčer-ma adolp-i mokla...*
 enemy-ERG Adolf.NOM killed
 ‘The enemy killed Adolf...’

With this speaker, we sometimes have the impression that the selection of one of the two codes, Georgian and Svan, is simply based upon what comes first to his mind; nevertheless, there are clear indications that Georgian is prevalent. Cf., e.g., the excerpt from a dialogue in example (20) in which his listeners try to remind him that he is asked to talk in Svan again after switching to Georgian:⁵⁰

- (20) a. *ešd-i-yöru bepšw gadawarčine.*
 10-and-2 child I.saved
 Georgian *t-or-meṭi bavšvi gadavarčine.*
 10-2-more child I.saved
 ‘Twelve children I saved.
 b. *game gadavarčine mati ded-eb-i da...*
 night I.saved their mother-PL-NOM and
 Georgian *game gadawarčine mati ded-eb-i da...*
 night I.saved their mother-PL-NOM and
 ‘During night I saved their mothers and ...’

50. Similar adhortations are frequent in our recordings of Batsbi and Udi, too.

- c. *lušnu-d lekar, lušnu-d!*
 Svan-ADV speak Svan-ADV
svanur-ad tkvi, svanur-ad!
 Svan-ADV speak Svan-ADV
 ‘Speak in Svan, (speak) in Svan!’
- d. *lušnu-d amži, gadavarčine da...*
 Svan-ADV so I.saved and
svanurad ase, gadavarčine da...
 Svan-ADV so I.saved and
 ‘In Svan, thus, I saved (them) and ...’

It is clear that the crucial point here is the Georgian verbal form *gadavarčine* ‘I saved’ of which the speaker seems no longer to remember a Svan equivalent.⁵¹ Whether this may be taken as an indication of a loss of competence must remain open. In any case, it must be stated that it is a finite Georgian verb form here which two times triggers the switching to this language.

3.4 The Udi case

From the sociological data, we may suppose right from the beginning that Oktomberi Udi is the most endangered of the three languages under investigation here, given that a) the number of speakers is by far the lowest (there are but a few hundred speakers left of the original Udi population of Oktomberi, plus some later migrants, mostly women, from the Udi villages in Azerbaijan, Vartashen and Nidj), there is no school teaching in Udi,⁵² the language is not written, and there are hardly any children who are still grown up learning their mother’s tongue. Due to the peculiar history of the Udi village in Georgia, the picture we receive as to dominant languages, interferences and code switching is much more variegated here than with Svan or Batsbi.

3.4.1

Given that the immediate influence of Georgian on Oktomberi Udi has been restricted to the past 80 years, we cannot expect to find as many borrowings of lexical elements here; at least there should be no loan words that would presuppose, by their phonetic structure, close contacts in Old or Middle Georgian times lest they would be found in the Azerbaijan varieties of Udi, too. As a matter of fact, the few Udi words that may be based on Old Georgian models such as, e.g., *ağcima* ‘Easter’ reflecting Old Georgian *ağvseba-* (cf. Batsbi *aqsba* ‘id.’) are common to all

51. This might have been *otsəlāw*, cp. Topuria/Kaldani (2000: s.v. *asəlwe*).

52. An Udi school has recently be opened in Oktomberi. Whether this will lead to a new attitude must remain open.

Udi varieties. What we do find as a peculiar ‘Georgian’ feature in the Oktomberi recordings, however, is the use of particles such *ai* ‘look, voilà’ (Georgian *ai*), *exla* ‘now’ (Georgian *exla*), *isa* ‘so’ (Georgian *isa*), *ese igi* ‘that is’ (Georgian *ese igi*), and the ubiquitous gap filler *ho da* ‘yes, and’ again (Georgian *ho da*), all clearly reminding of the facts we have described for Svan and Batsbi. With some speakers at least, these elements seem to compete with Russian particles such as *pačti* ‘nearly’ (Russian *почти* ‘id.’) or *prosto* ‘simply’ (Russian *просто* ‘id.’); we have to note in this respect, however, that the use of these latter elements is often met with in colloquial Georgian itself, thus indicating a certain dominance of the *lingua franca* of the Soviet empire still prevailing everywhere in the region. That Georgian has developed to be the primary language of most Udi speakers of Oktomberi is clearly demonstrated by instances of code switching covering the same types as in the examples quoted above.

3.4.2

With Oktomberi Udi, special attention must be paid to the speech of the later migrants, mostly women who came to the village from Vartashen or Nidj for marriage. What we can expect under these conditions is interferences of several dominant languages mixed with each other, and this is exactly what we find in the recording of one of these women. Speaking about the customs of courting and marriage used among Udi people, she switches between the local (Vartashen/Oktomberi) variety, her mother tongue (Nidj Udi), Russian, Georgian, and Azeri elements without any ratio visible except for the tendency to repeat certain phrases or clauses in one of the other languages. In example (21) taken from her narrative, Russian elements are marked by bold letters, Georgian ones by italics, and Azeri elements by bold italics; the (one) Nidj element is marked by underlining, while Vartashen Udi elements remain unmarked.

- a. ...ani ai... **kaḳ kaḳ** *kaḳra ra*, **kaḳ ai**, **kaḳ sṭrogi** ani, očen
 they look how strong what how look how strong they very
 sṭrogi. . .
 strong
 ‘They, look. . . how strong, well, how, look, how strong they are, very strong.’
- b. Yesli **ḳtoḳo** ai voṭ **devuška** **xəteli**.by –
 if somebody look there girl want.would
 If someone, look, wants a girl there –
- c. *šinṭe* *buṭuxsa* *ṭe* *xinär* *efestaḡo*, sa *lašḳon-a* geräg
 somebody he.wants that girl to.marry one marriage-to necessary
 taḡan.
 to.go
 if somebody wants to marry that girl, he must go for a wedding.

- d. Laşkon-a čiča-čun xinär-a *sadğac*, *ev-e*
 marriage-to take.out-they girl-DAT *somewhere house-to*
tqakusunaxun,
they.go.together
 For a wedding they select a girl from somewhere, they go together to the house,
- e. ait-čun-exa... *ho* xinär-ena oša *ai* –
 speak-they-do *yes* girl-about afterwards *look*
 they speak... yes, about the girl then, look –
- f. bıp taysa to ku-a çato işqar-mux, *xo da* he-čun-besa,
 four go that house-to together men-PL *yes* and off-they-do
 four (people) go together to that house, the men, yes and begin,
- g. ait-čun-exa **tuda-suda**, iräzi-čun-baksa...
 word-they-speak **there-here** merriful-they-are
 they speak (among each other about) this-and-that, have fun...?

3.4.3

It may be that some of the instances of code switching we have recorded were due to the special situation of native speakers being interviewed by non-native speakers (or with non-native speakers present) and recordings being made by foreigners. This is especially probable for the extensive use of Russian in the example from Oktomberi which was undertaken by M. Tandashvili and myself (in October 2002); it is not probable for most of the other recordings quoted, however, as these were made by members of our team who are native speakers of the languages in question themselves. So it can be taken for granted in any way that many speakers of all three languages investigated in our project have severe problems trying to produce longer units of texts, monological or not, without inadvertently switching to Georgian, either under the influence of “trigger” words or due to a loss of competence. If older editions of text materials in these languages do not show similar effects, at least not to the same extent, this may well be due to the fact that they were rigidly edited to display a consistent, unmixed picture.⁵³ It is one of the advantages of digitally stored audio-visual recordings that authentic monologues and dialogues can now be published alongside printed versions, thus warranting a realistic presentation of a spoken language even in its decline.

53. This is especially likely for the series Svanuri prozauli tekštebi (4 vols., Tbilisi 1939–).

3.5 Summary and outlook

Summing the observations here reported up, we may formulate the following three statements concerning the linguistic indications of language endangerment that apply to the given set of Caucasian languages:

- The frequent use of “discourse particles” (conjunctions, interjections) pertaining to a dominant language speaks in favour of this language being in a dominant position not only in the given society but also in the speakers’ brains.
- The integration of fully inflected nominal and verbal forms of the dominant language into narrative texts or dialogues speaks in favour of the dominant language being used primarily (at least by the given speaker); it remains a special case though as it requires compatible grammatical systems.
- Code switching to the dominant language introduced by “trigger” words (incl. discourse particles) within narratives and dialogues speaks in favour of the dominant language being used not only in “marked” situations (speaking with foreigners, the administration, in school) but also in everyday conversation within the community.

In all three cases, the dominant position of the one language manifesting itself in the outlined phenomena can be taken as an indication of the endangerment of the dominated vernacular; for a language that is no longer used primarily by its native speakers will be abandoned soon. To corroborate this conclusion, we may compare the case of Polabian, an extinct Slavonic language formerly spoken in the German Wendland, a region of Lower Saxony near the Elbe river. One of the few documents of this language that were noted down is the prayer of Our Father, recorded in the late 17th century by Christian Henning von Jessen, a Protestant pastor of Wustrow near Lüchow. Quite in the same way as some of our Svan, Batsbi, or Udi texts, this prayer is so much interspersed with (Lower) German elements, among them basic verbs, that the reader may wonder whether this is a Slavonic language at all; cf. the arrangement in Table 9 where German elements are marked in bold letters.⁵⁴

It is true that the morphology of the verbal forms here is still Polabian, not German,⁵⁵ thus reminding of Romance verbs in English such as *deliver* or *appear* again which cannot be taken as a proof of modern English being endangered. Nevertheless, we do know from history that the Polabian language was abandoned about 50 years after this prayer was written down. The decisive reason for its ex-

54. Cf. the edition in Rost (1907: 177f.).

55. Both *bringoy* and *lösoy* presuppose a present stem formed with the suffix *-ova-*, quasi **bringovay* and **lösovay* (2nd person sg. imperatives). The formation of *warda*, *komma* and *schinyöt* remains unclear as the category of a 3rd person imperative is unknown in Slavonic.

Table 9.

Nóŕe Wader, ta toy giŕ wa Nebisgáy, Sjungta woarda tŭgí Geima, tia Rik komma, tia Willia ŕchinyôt, kok wa Nebisgáy, tók kak no Sime. Nóŕe wiŕbedanneisna Steiba doy nám dâns, un wittedoy nám nóŕe Ggrêch, kak moy wittedoyime nóŕem Grêsmarim. Ni bringoy nós ka Warfikónye, tay löfoáy nós wit wiŕbókak Chaudak. Amen.	Our Father, Thou (who) art in Heaven, Thy name 'become' hallowed, Thy Empire come, Thy will appear, as in Heaven, thus also on Earth. Our daily bread give us today, and foregive us our debt(s), as we foregive our debtors. (Do) not 'bring' us into temptation, but deliver ('loosen') us from all evil. Amen.
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inction was noted by Christian Hennig himself in his "Vocabularium Venedicum", the one and only existing vocabulary of Polabian. In the introduction to this work, Hennig wrote: "At present, Polabian is spoken by only a few of the elder people of this area. The younger people, however, feel so nauseated by their mother tongue that they do not even want to listen to it, let alone to learn it. Therefore we have to presume that inevitably, the language will be extinct after 20 or, at the most, 30 years."⁵⁶

While Hennig's prophecy that the lack of prestige of the Polabian vernacular would soon lead to its abandonment was right, another prophecy of this type has proven wrong so far. In his 1863 account of Udi, Anton Schiefner, one of the pioneers of Caucasian linguistics, stated: "The Tartar language, especially in its Azerbaijanian dialect, keeps gaining ground from year to year, and we can expect almost with certainty that the Udi language will have disappeared within a short while."⁵⁷ 140 years have passed eversince this was published, and we can note with emphasis that the Udi language is still alive. Whether it will be able to survive the present degree of endangerment for long, will remain a matter of doubt though.

56. "Jetziger Zeit reden hier herum nur noch einige von den Alten wendisch, und dürfen es kaum vor ihren Kindern und anderen jungen Leuten thun, weil sie damit ausgelachet werden: Gestalt diese, die Jungen einen solchen Ekel für ihre Muttersprache haben, daß sie sie nicht einmal mehr hören, geschweige denn lernen mögen. Dahero unfehlbar zu vermuten, daß innerhalb 20, zum höchsten 30 Jahren, wenn die Alten vorbei, die Sprache auch wird vergangen seyn, und man sodann keinen Wende mehr mit seiner Sprache allhier wird zu hören kriegen, wenn man gleich viel Geld drum geben wollte." (Rost 1907: 10).

57. "Im Allgemeinen gewinnt das Tatarische, namentlich der Aderbidshanische Dialekt, von Jahr zu Jahr mehr Boden, und es lässt sich ziemlich sicher erwarten, dass das Udische in kurzer Zeit ganz verschwunden sein wird." (Schiefner 1863: 4).

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Appendix: Batsbi poem by David Arindauli

<i>mādel mo' baral ūtaḵ vagāⁿ</i>	I wish I could find a man
<i>seⁿ daḵiⁿ ambui xačanā,</i>	to share my heart's concern with,
<i>vāiⁿ moṭṭ daḵ co bāvitaⁿ</i>	that our language should not get lost,
<i>soⁿ saⁿ oḡuiⁿ doḵ lačanā.</i>	that it should hurt his heart as it hurts mine.
<i>sog larḵ 'ēpnišī menā deyš,</i>	Those of you who listen to me,
<i>vomaⁿ deyš sox soub xačinā.</i>	all of you know more than me.
<i>co hāngo ča' com xēčdos ūg,</i>	None of you tells anything to anybody,
<i>le co mēqmaḵ soⁿ ālčinā,</i>	but I can't stay without saying,
<i>āllet sog vuxaḵ dolet vey,</i>	“tell me what to do
<i>ālłomciⁿ bāvinč matṭinā.</i>	for the language lost without saying.”
<i>nhaḡ yēčce, ḵiḵlimak vēteš</i>	When my sleep disappears I wander around –
<i>čiroḡ vālen vas mattanā.</i>	I've become a plague for my bed.
<i>duḡ daḵlivās mā txalōmciⁿ,</i>	I think a lot, but I can't find
<i>čomal co beyl soⁿ laxanā,</i>	the medicine till nowadays,
<i>šuiⁿ moṭṭ daḵ co bāvitaⁿ</i>	why can't people manage
<i>vunaḵ co dēčel nāxn maḵāⁿ?</i>	not to lose their own language?
<i>vāiⁿ moṭṭ korē čhaḡbanēn</i>	I can't see even a little path
<i>ḵačḵoⁿ biliḵa' co xēt soⁿ,</i>	for holding and fixing our language,
<i>daḵlėvrex kort daḵḵuvbaliⁿ,</i>	I almost get grey from thinking,
<i>vuxaḵ da dēčles co xe' sōⁿ.</i>	I don't know what to do.
<i>tuḵla duḡi ba 'amdien,</i>	There are many scholars,
<i>com mēqduic ḡaltagdačinā,</i>	nothing remains undone,
<i>ča – šimo' vunag co vāgul</i>	why are there not one or two
<i>iḡ ambuimak doḵ lačinā?</i>	who support it?