

The Russification Language Policy in Georgia (According to the Press of the Georgian Emigrants of the First Half of XX Century)¹

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Russification is a special case of cultural assimilation when small nations come under the influence of the Russian language and culture (Kappeler, 2004; Miller, 2008; Weinerman, 1996). In 1921 this process became more intense in Georgia when the Bolshevik forces abolished its independence and sovietized the country. The field of education was completely subordinated to the Commissariat of Education of the Soviet Socialist Empire, and a number of measures began to be implemented within the framework of Russification: in Georgian schools the Russian and Georgian languages had equal status; clerical work was done in Russian; in theaters plays were staged in Russian; in churches and monasteries religious services were held in Russian.

After the sovietization of Georgia, the government and political parties were forced to emigrate. When abroad they began working actively to restore the lost independence. To achieve this goal, they founded the Press of the Georgian emigrants. The strongly expressed negative attitude towards the Georgian language by the Soviet authorities and the fight against it was considered one of the key issues in the press of the Georgian emigrants.

The paper aims at studying the problems of the Russification language policy on the example of Georgia. The digital corpus of the press of the Georgian emigrants of the first half of XX century will be used as empirical evidence. Through collecting appropriate illustrative materials and the method of sociolinguistic analysis the following questions will be answered:

- 1) What was the ratio between the "guest" (Russian) and "host" (Georgian) languages?
- 2) Were Georgian-Russian linguistic contacts peaceful or was there a linguistic conflict?
- 3) To what extent was the local population of Georgia ready to adopt (in all areas of life) the Russian language?
- 4) Under the Russification language policy in Georgia, in what directions was the protection of the Georgian language provided?

It is noteworthy that in the press of the Georgian emigrants of the first half of XX century, the issue of the language situation of Georgia was almost inaccessible not only to the general public, but even to specialists interested in this topic. Under the seventy-year communist regime, even the existence of the emigrant press remained obscure. The identity of those public figures who described the status of the Georgian language and depicted the picture of its functioning in the emigrant press was also unknown. The results of the research carried out within the framework of the paper will contribute to correcting the inaccuracies and will give researchers the opportunity to learn about the sociolinguistic problems revealed in the press of the Georgian emigrants.

Such an approach to the issue will give us the opportunity to see the dangers of the Russification language policy from a historical point of view, and under what pressure the Georgian language had to function during the Soviet regime.

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