

Spasibo or thank you? The shifting nature of Russian and English in Georgia

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Introduction

Governed by different empires, Georgians have heard a number of foreign tongues throughout history: Farsi, Turkish, Russian. It seems that at this point in time the English language is the most commonly used foreign language in the Republic of Georgia. Street name signs in the capital Tbilisi and other cities are transliterated into English. Young people in different parts of the country generally seem to have a fair grasp of the English language. At first sight, it seems that they contrast with their elders, who often have a better hold of Russian. Although there are people in Georgia of different age who speak both English and Russian on an equal level, most visitors to Georgia expect to see a generational language divide.

The reason for this generational divide is easily explained. The language reforms of former President Mikheil Saakashvili included, among other things, making English a mandatory language in Georgian public schools. The motivation behind these reforms seemed to have come from Saakashvili's personal conviction that a language shift would lead to the gradual adoption of Western values (Van Der Wusten and Chanturia, 2018). Also, the reforms were motivated by the fact that Russian language no longer has the same pragmatic function it had in Soviet times of being the medium to access "world" culture and move up the social ladder. The function of Russian is reduced to being a tool for interethnic communication between Georgians and the Armenian and Azeri ethnic minorities residing in Georgia, as well as the language of communication with many residents of other post-Soviet states (Van Der Wusten and Nodia, 2018).

From 2016 onwards, an increase of tourists from Russia has been observed. This trend is expected to continue and thus Russian still seems to be a prerequisite to have a successful career, at least in the tourist and hospitality sectors of the Georgian economy (Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2018; Raspopina, 2016). Together with the increase of Russian "soft power" (Russian propaganda was recognised as a security threat for Georgia in May 2017), this may at first sight seem to create fertile ground for a gradual change of attitude in Georgia towards Russia (Kanashvili, 2017). Learning English is recognised as attractive in many ways (access to entertainment, internet and more), but is Russian perhaps on the path to becoming more attractive again?

That doesn't seem to be the case. English today is generally considered more useful for career purposes than Russian. Data shows that English speakers are more respected than Russian speakers in Georgia (Blauvelt, 2013). Russia's attractiveness is not backed up by its actions: the territorial dispute over the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is very destructive for Russia's image in Georgia, while at the same time Russia does not seem to invest in Georgia to the same extent the EU, China and the US do.

A Georgian friend told me that the level of Russian language proficiency amongst her peers depends to a great extent on family background: some parents invest in their children's Russian, while others don't. This may be due to different reasons: some parents may simply not see any practical use in the Russian language today, while others, primarily as a result of the 2008 war, don't want their children to learn Russian out of protest. As a result, the young Russian tourist in Georgia, who doesn't

know whether to initiate a conversation in English or in Russian with Georgian peers, will always remain a bit confused: depending on the Georgian interlocutor's family background and education, he or she may speak Russian, English, both or neither.

Looking at the wider picture, Russian seems to be coming back, but as a foreign language. It is considered to be a prerequisite in the tourist and hospitality sectors, and an important asset for business communication. Its function as a language of communication with other post-Soviet states will not go away for the time being. Furthermore, many Georgians have family connections in Russia.

Many questions remain. English and Russian language use seems largely to depend on political preferences, functionality and habit. What does English and Russian language use currently look like in Georgia and can assessments about the future be made, while considering the current state and developments?

Background

In the Soviet period, Georgian was granted the status of the official language of the Republic together with Russian. Although Russian was essential and many Georgians knew Russian, it is important to note that unlike most Soviet republics, Russian was never the primary language used within the family in Georgia; Georgian was spoken within the family, and also used within bureaucracy and the education and public spheres (Van Der Wusten and Chanturia, 2018). Following Georgia's independence in 1990, Russian was stripped of all its official 'privileges'. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to divide Georgia's recent history of independence into three political periods with different policy preferences with regards to language. I will focus on language in the public space and education.

Just after independence, the role and place of ethnic minorities in the new emerging state constituted a much more pressing issue than the issues of the Russian speaking population (Korth, Stepanian and Muskhelishvili, 2005). But the ethno-religious nationalism embraced by Georgia's first President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, had an effect on both the ethnic minorities and the wider Russian-speaking population, since it excluded the use of every language other than the official state language, Georgian (Driscoll, Berglund and Blauvelt, 2016). Only street name signs in Georgian remained and signs in Russian disappeared (Gahrton, 2010; Van Der Wusten and Nodia, 2018). The Gamsakhurdia period was very short-lived and was marked by internal disputes, meaning that no new education policy was developed, which may explain the lack of official sources on this topic (Van Der Wusten and Nodia, 2018). It could have been observed that the Russian language in education was being restricted as it was in the public space: in an informal conversation with a resident of Tbilisi at that time, I was told how suddenly Russian language classes in kindergarten disappeared, leaving only Georgian.

With the coming to power of Eduard Shevardnadze and the gradual consolidation of the state's central power after years of internal conflict, Russian was again tolerated in the public space and education (Korth, Stepanian and Muskhelishvili, 2005; Amirejibi-Mullen, 2011). At the same time, there were legal attempts to strengthen the position of Georgian in the country. The Law on Advertisement (1998) forbade other languages than Georgian to be displayed on billboards, unless Georgian translation or transliteration was being provided. This is an example of how, still, indirectly the use of both Russian and English language was being restricted in the public space. During the Shevardnadze period, Russian secondary schools were considered relatively prestigious and had a special status among minority language schools, because many different ethnic minorities attended these Russian schools. That these schools were in a way preparing the next generation of emigrants

was an often-heard criticism: in 2004 and in the preceding years, there seem to have been a significant number of émigrés to Russia (Korth, Stepanian and Muskhelishvili, 2005). Nevertheless, a decrease in Russian classes in Georgia was already observed from 1991 (Van Der Wusten and Nodia, 2018). It is not clear whether the reason for this was that Georgian as a language of instruction gained popularity or that emigration to Russia ‘depopulated’ the schools. According to a representative of the Ministry of Education of Georgia, during the Shevardnadze era, the education model did not develop and most schools were still using textbooks and teaching methods from the Soviet period (Van Der Wusten and Chkhikvadze, 2018).

Change came with the Saakashvili government in 2004. For the new government, the Western course was a priority and with it came changes in language education. Soon after 2004, a so-called optimisation process began, which saw the merging of public schools. There were 3500 public schools in Georgia in 2003 and this number decreased by 40% as a result of the process. Also as a result, the number of schools with a language of instruction other than Georgian went down from 343 to 213. To the criticism that it was closing down Russian schools, the government argued that its policies were not directed towards Russian schools in particular, but that the decrease was part of the wider optimisation process. As a result, there are currently 14 schools with Russian as the language of instruction in Georgia (Van Der Wusten and Chanturia, 2018).

The first National Curriculum programme was developed in 2005 and introduced in 2006. The first edition of the programme ran in the years 2006-2010, the second edition in 2011-2016, and the third edition was launched in 2016. In the first edition, all foreign languages were considered to be equal: schools could choose from a selection of ‘levels’ and decide themselves which foreign languages to teach their students. The choice was between English, Russian, German and French (Van Der Wusten and Chkhikvadze, 2018). In an informal conversation with a Tbilisi resident who went to school in the period 1995-2006, I was told to pay particular attention to how, at that time, one had classes in ‘Russian and an optional foreign language’. This is confirmed by other sources: before the implementation of the National Curriculum, pupils had two or three obligatory Russian lessons per week (Korth, Stepanian and Muskhelishvili, 2005). Making Russian a foreign language equal to German, French and English after the introduction of the National Curriculum in 2006 brought about many concerns about the status of Russian in Georgia (Korth, Stepanian and Muskhelishvili, 2005). In 2011, English was made a mandatory language from grade one, and Russian was made an optional language alongside German, French and other languages. This was all part of the revised second version of the National Curriculum (2011-2016). In 2016, changes to the National Curriculum foresaw that schools could choose the second foreign language in fifth grade instead of seventh. Schools decide on the second foreign language themselves, and, as a representative of the Ministry of Education confirmed, this is mostly Russian. In effect, this would imply more knowledge of Russian than any other foreign language (apart from English) for those who take that option. More extensive teaching of English in education also means the adoption of new teaching methods. It is a move away from the grammar-and-memorisation approach that was predominant in Soviet language teaching. This is a new aspect of adopting Western values (Van Der Wusten and Chkhikvadze, 2018).

In parallel, the Teach and Learn with Georgia (TLG) program was initiated by the Saakashvili government in 2010: native English speakers were en masse invited to Georgia to come and teach English in schools. Although the program seems to have had its organisational flaws as well as some discontent from the side of the policy designers, as they expected the program to have a wider impact (Van Der Wusten and Chanturia, 2018; Fahey, 2018), I was told by a participant that the program was effective: when she participated in 2014, Russian seemed to have been a more dominant language in both Tbilisi and the regions than it is now in 2018.

Furthermore, the period 2009-2011 saw the introduction of several laws aimed at the restriction of Russian language use in the public space. The law governing film and television

broadcast language was initiated in 2009. An amendment to the law written in mid-2010 and enacted on 1 January 2011 specifically addresses the broadcasting language of films. According to the law, film demonstrations can only be shown in the original language with Georgian subtitles or with Georgian dubbing. In practice, however, English language film demonstrations without Georgian subtitles or dubbing were not fined, while Russian language film showings were. Furthermore, in January 2011, a supposed ban of Russian songs in the public area of Tbilisi was introduced, primarily in restaurants and cafés. This appeared as a rumour, but still, many restaurant and café owners obeyed the assumed ban (Maxfield Waldman Sherouse, 2014).

Method

It is therefore the aim of this study to find out, in particular for persons in the age group 15-33 (born between 1985 and 2003),

- a. *who* speaks Russian and English (does the ability to speak the language correlate with gender, age, job and place of residence?),
- b. *how* Russian and English is spoken (actual use of language in speech situations, language choice),

I focus on this particular age group because it is fair to assume that those born in 1985 were the first generation that started going to school in independent Georgia, from approximately 1991 onwards; in 2003, the same year the Rose Revolution took place, the current 15-year-olds were born and they have now virtually finished their secondary education. As was shown in the introduction, there are many assumptions with regards to English and Russian language use and its reasons in Georgia, assumptions not backed up by data. This study also aims to provide such data.

I will answer these questions with the help of two tracks:

- 1) A questionnaire that targeted primarily the age group 15-33 through social media (primarily Facebook) and email. The questionnaire was sent out on 13 February 2018, retrieved on 11 April 2018, and translated into English between 11 April and 16 April 2018. Furthermore, the same questionnaire targeted secondary school pupils in the Khulo district (Adjara region) and Chokhatauri district (Guria region). The questionnaire was answered on 3 and 4 April 2018 in Khulo and Chokhatauri, respectively.
- 2) My daily interactions with locals in Tbilisi have been put into an appropriate format. The interactions took place in the period 27 January - 20 February 2018. The tourist season in Tbilisi had not yet started at that time, my assumption being that this would influence local language choices.

The results are interpreted particularly against the background of language policies in Georgia, from its independence up until the present day, with a focus on education. Policy documents and interviews with experts will serve as my main sources for this subject.

I will be assessing two very different groups: the online questionnaires targeted mainly Tbilisi residents and people outside of secondary education, while the questionnaires in the Khulo and Chokhatauri districts targeted secondary school students. This will be taken into account when analysing the results.

Analysis of the results

Who speaks Russian and English

The online questionnaire

I will firstly answer *who* speaks Russian and English by analysing the responses to the online questionnaire. Secondly, I will do the same for the responses to the questionnaire in the Khulo and Chokhatauri districts. To answer this, I will first analyse the answers to question 3: ‘Which language do you frequently use in daily life - English or Russian?’ Then I will analyse the answers to question 4, 5a and 5b: 4) ‘Except for Georgian, which language do you study most intensively?’; 5a) ‘Please answer the following questions according to your answer to the previous one. How long did you study this language in school?’; 5b) ‘Did you study this language outside of school? Please specify’.

Some general information on the responses to the online questionnaire first. The highest amount of responses seems to come from the age groups 21-26 and 27-32 (27 and 29 responses respectively)¹. 46.2% of the total amount of 78 respondents are male, 53.8% are female. 88.4% respondents are from Tbilisi, the remaining 12.8% responses are from Batumi, Telavi and Kutaisi. Of the 69 Tbilisi respondents, 13 reside in the Saburtalo district, 9 in the Vake district and 6 in the Vera district; 20 did not specify their respective district in Tbilisi. Of the total amount of 78 responses, 38.4% work in the private sector, 23.1% combine work and studies, 19.2% study only, 14.1% work in the public sector, 5.1% chose none of the available options. This already shows that I targeted mainly Tbilisi urban residents, a significant amount of whom resides in the relatively wealthy districts of Tbilisi. I will elaborate on these districts in the upcoming sections. Furthermore, a significant amount of respondents studies in higher education.

When assessing the responses to question 3 of the online questionnaire (Fig. 1), one can see that the majority prefers to use English frequently in daily life. But let us look closer (Fig. 2).

Fig. 1: Q3. Which language do you frequently use in daily life - English or Russian?

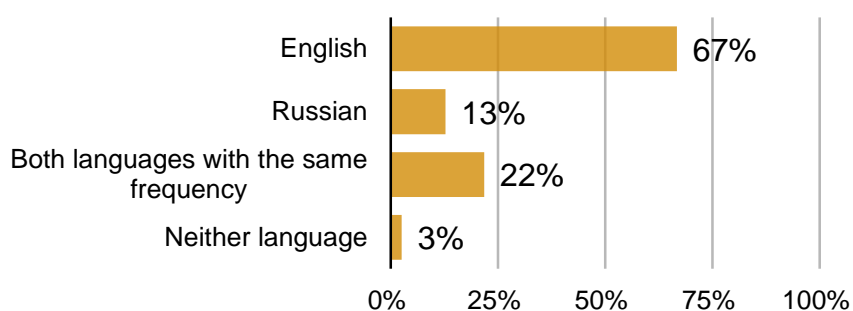


Fig. 2:

	English	Russian	Both English and Russian	Neither English and Russian
Average age	27.9	38	28.3	39.5
Gender	45% male, 55% female	33% male, 67% female	50% male, 50% female	100% male

¹ This answer may not be fully accurate, since I counted these specific amounts using only pen and paper.

Job/studies	37% employed in private sector, 16% employed in the public sector, 25% combines work and studies, 22% studies only, 11% none of the options	33% employed in private sector, 33% employed in public sector, 11% combines work and studies, 11% studies only, 11% none of the options	38% employed in private sector, 6% employed in the public sector, 25% combines work and studies 18% studies only, 12% none of the options,	100% employed in private sector
Place of residence	86.5% resides in Tbilisi; Saburtalo (8), Vake (6), Vera (5), Telavi (4)	77.8% resides in Tbilisi; unspecified district of Tbilisi (2), Saburtalo (2)	93.8% resides in Tbilisi; unspecified district of Tbilisi (5), Saburtalo (3), Vake (3), Vera (2)	Tbilisi (1), Kutaisi (1)

First of all, when looking at those who answered question 3 of the online questionnaire, a generational divide between the language users can immediately be observed when comparing the average age of the English or both languages categories with the Russian or neither language categories. The difference between the gender makeup is surprising: males and females are more or less equally represented in the English and both languages categories, while there is an overrepresentation of females in the Russian category and only males present in the neither language category. A significant amount of those who chose English or both languages is employed in the private sector and other major groups combine work and studies or studies only. In the Russian category, a relatively significant amount compared to the other categories is employed in the public sector, while a lesser amount of respondents combines work and studies or studies only.

When looking at the place of residence, one can see that the majority of English and both languages users resides in Tbilisi, with a significant amount in the ‘posh’ areas of Tbilisi, in particular Vera and Vake. To quote the website Likealocal: ‘Before, in this part of the city lived people who were connected with [the] political or scientific elite of Georgia. Now it's [the] a kind of fancy neighbourhood, and there are still jokes about "Vakeli" people, but [it] seems like the "Vakeli" themselves don't really mind’ (<https://www.likealocalguide.com/tbilisi/neighbourhood/vake#places>). The Saburtalo district, by contrast, does not seem to have any special historical or cultural features and is one of the largest residential districts in Tbilisi (<https://www.likealocalguide.com/tbilisi/neighbourhood/saburtalo#places>).

The following anecdotal evidence may describe the Vake district. In Soviet times, knowing Russian well was not only functional, but also considered to be sophisticated. As I was told in an informal conversation with a Tbilisi resident, in the ‘posh’ Vake district of Tbilisi today, a certain female urban type of approximately 40 years of age prefers to gossip in Russian with friends². This was confirmed by a resident of another Tbilisi district, Saburtalo. Although the current realities with regards to Russia are very different to what they used to be, Russian language still seems to have an appeal for this female urban type of the Vake district. I observed this urban type myself during a visit to the Rustaveli Drama Theatre in Tbilisi on 31 March 2018, where I saw a Russian language theatre production from Moscow. A group of well-dressed ladies were speaking both Georgian and Russian to each other, constantly switching between the two.

² A typical phrase such an urban type would use is: ‘*chemi podruga*’. It consists of the Georgian possessive pronoun *chemi*, meaning *my*, and the Russian word *podruga*, meaning *(girl)friend/female friend*.

The majority of the respondents from the Russian language category lives in Tbilisi. It is hard to outline groups in this category by place of residence. There are no significantly large groups that reside in the ‘posh’ districts. 2 respondents reside in Batumi, a very popular destination for Russian-speaking tourists. The neither language category has two respondents: one resides in Gldani, an area of Tbilisi that is relatively far removed from the city centre, and works in the local shopping mall; the other respondent resides in Kutaisi, the third-most-populous city in Georgia.

All in all, when assessing this figure, education comes out more prominently in the English or both languages categories. One can assume the respondents within the English and both languages categories are better off than those in the Russian or neither language categories: the former categories reside in the wealthy districts of Tbilisi. Surprising is that a significant amount of frequent Russian language users works in the public sector.

As one can see from the answers to question 4 (Fig. 3), most respondents studied English most intensively. Furthermore, figure 4 shows that a significantly high amount of respondents supposedly studied English with private teachers. This is not the case with Russian: more respondents said that they studied the language in higher education. Furthermore, one respondent who chose the Russian option in question 4 said that Russian language knowledge comes from kindergarten; another responded that it is used within the family. English does not seem to be used within the family.

Fig. 3:

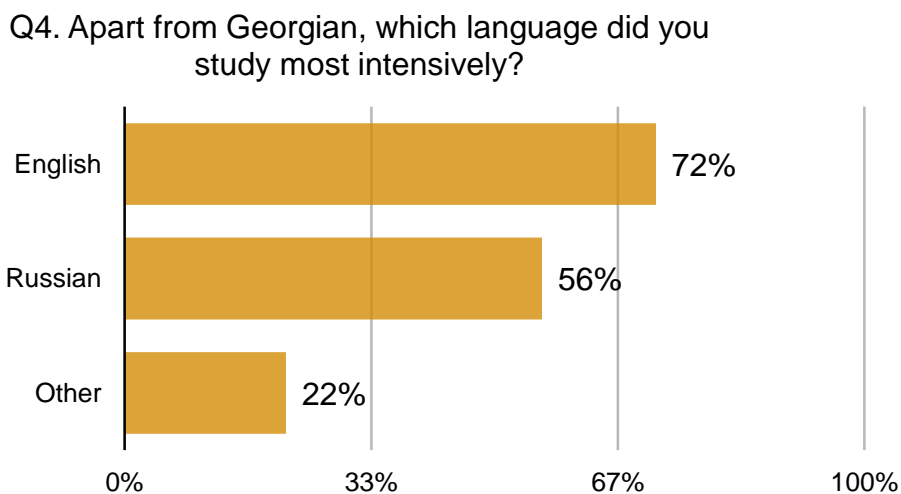


Fig. 4:

	English	Russian
Average amount of years studied	8.5	8.3
Places of study outside of school	Private tutor (11), higher education (9), language school (3), both private and higher education (1), university and language school (1)	Private tutor (2), higher education (6)

When the respondents had to choose which language they use frequently in daily life, English or Russian, the majority (66.7%) opted for English. 71.8% says that, except for Georgian, they studied English most intensively, against 56.8% for Russian.

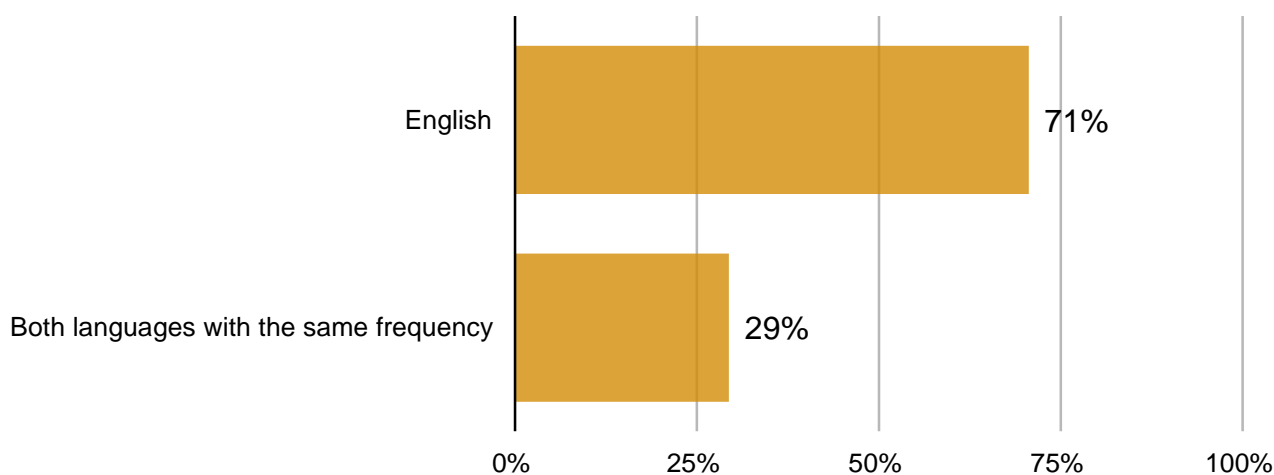
The question naturally arises as to whether there are respondents who use English frequently in daily life, while having studied another language most intensively. If so, what is the background to this issue and who are these people? We are talking here about 10 respondents. The average age of this group of respondents is 30.1 years, 6 out of 10 respondents are male, 4 respondents are only studying, all reside in Tbilisi. The average age of this group is very similar to the average age of those who chose English or both languages in question 3. The gender distribution is also very similar. So it seems that people of this category use as much English as those who learned it in school. This suggests that the National Curriculum is not the main driver behind the use of English in this age category. The other way around, when it comes to those who have studied English and/or another language most intensively, but frequently use Russian in daily life, we are talking about only one respondent. The respondent is 19-years-old, female, lives in the Sololaki district of Tbilisi and works in the private sector. What does this tell us? Of course, one respondent does not tell us much about the system as a whole. As far as we are willing to conclude something, it suggests that the private sector is not necessarily a precondition for extensive English language use.

The questionnaire in Khulo and Chokhatauri

Let us now turn to the questionnaire results in the Khulo and Chokhatauri districts. The villages are located in two different regions, but both villages house a significant proportion of muslims, a minority in the overall Orthodox Christian Georgia. Taking into account the existing differences between both villages, I will separate the analysis of the questionnaire results. Figures 5 and 6 show the profiles of the average English, Russian, both languages and neither language speakers in the Khulo and Chokhatauri districts respectively.

Fig. 5:

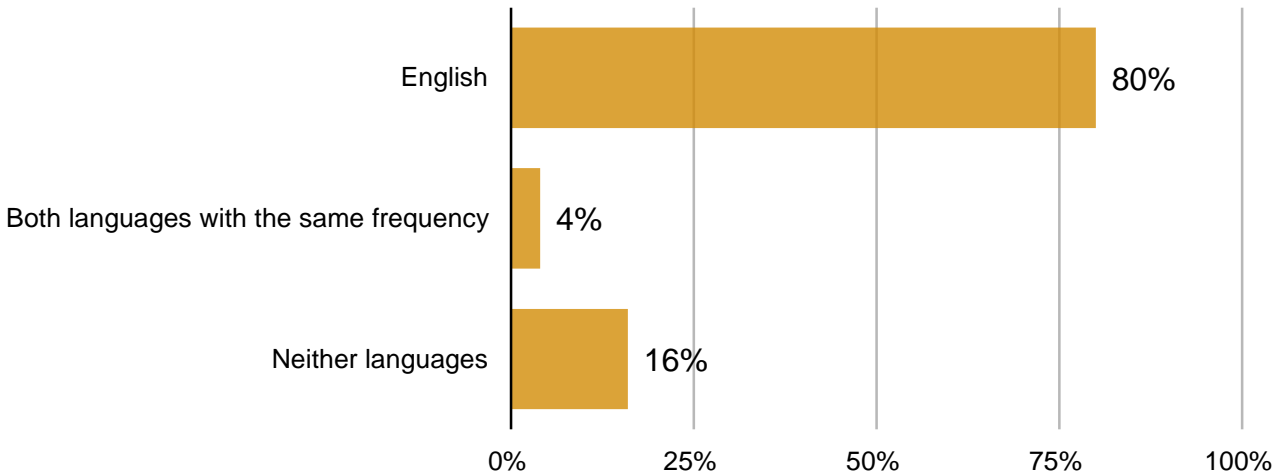
Q3. Which language do you frequently use in daily life - English or Russian? (Khulo)



	English	Russian	Both English and Russian	Neither English and Russian
Average age	16.41	-	14.6	-
Gender	39% female, 61% male	-	40% female, 60% male	-
Job/studies	Uchlcho Public School (1), Kedlebi Public School (2), Ganalchleba Public School (2), Khulo Public School (1)	-	Kedlebi Public School (2), Mirkvadze Public School (1)	-
Place of residence	Kedlebi (3), Tago (1), Dekanashviledi (1)	-	Kedlebi (2), Mirkvadze (1)	-

Fig. 6:

3. Which language do you frequently use in daily life - English or Russian? (Chokhatauri)



	English	Russian	Both English and Russian	Neither English and Russian
Average age	16.55	-	16	16.3
Gender	65% female, 35% male	-	100% female	50% female, 50% male

Place of study	Nabeghlavi Public School (3), Zoti Public School (4). The remainder do not specify.	-	-	-
Place of residence (village)	Nabeghlavi (4), Zoti (12), Chkhakoura (3)	-	Zoti (1)	Zoti (3), Kvabgha (1)

Some general information on the results first. A total of 46 questionnaires were answered in Khulo and Chokhatauri: 19 in the Khulo district, 27 in the Chokhatauri district. The average age of the respondents in the Khulo district is 15.83³; 7 respondents are female, 12 are male. The average age of the respondents in the Chokhatauri district is 16.48 years; 7 respondents are male, 18 are female, 2 did not specify their gender.

When looking at the average age of the language categories for Khulo (Fig. 5), it is surprising that the Russian and neither language categories were not chosen by any of the respondents. Furthermore, there is a gap between the average age of the English and both languages categories and the majority of the respondents in both categories is male. The over-representation of males could perhaps be explained by the following: in Khulo, I ended up talking to a 14-year-old male student of one of the districts' public schools; in the end I was able to distribute the questionnaire primarily among his group of friends, mostly males of the same age.

As this 14-year-old male student from Khulo told me, he learned English mostly by watching TV series, Youtube videos and playing computer games. He is primarily interested in learning English. He is able to understand and speak some Russian. When I asked him about his fellow students, he said that some of his friends prefer Russian, others English. Language preference, he told me, differs per family. I wasn't able to identify whether language preference thus depends on the family's socioeconomic background or religion. He furthermore told me that in either fifth or seventh grade the class had to vote on the second language. Along the lines of the second edition of the National Curriculum (2011-2016), Georgian schools introduce the second optional second language in grade 7. Changes in the latest edition of the National Curriculum foresee that the optional second language is introduced in grade 5. Looking at the age of the male student in question, I do not know if the second language was introduced in fifth or seventh grade. For the class, the choice was between German and Russian. He himself chose German, but he shared that the majority of his classmates opted for Russian.

Some comments may be enlightening in this regard. A respondent from the Kedlebi Public School in the Khulo district said that 'English in our school is taught very badly'. Another respondent answered for question 5a ('How long did you study this language in school?') 'I avoid making any comment'. Both comments may be similar in the way that they highlight the language education problems in the respective districts. This may be a major reason why the previously mentioned school pupil from Khulo learned English mostly by watching TV series, Youtube videos and playing computer games.

In the Chokhatauri district (Fig. 6) some respondents chose the neither language category, which was not the case in Khulo. There is less of a difference in the average age between the categories. There is a female over-representation in the district's results. In Chokhatauri, it was the

³ 1 respondent didn't specify their age

teacher, not me, who asked the students to fill out the questionnaire, but this fact does not necessarily explain the female overrepresentation.

The reason respondents in Chokhatauri, but not in Khulo, chose the neither language option remains unclear. I will attempt to analyse this. As I was told in an informal conversation with the director of the Zoti Public School, youth unemployment is a major problem in Zoti. Young people who have just finished their secondary education do not have work prospects in Zoti or the wider Chokhatauri district. They are either forced to leave the village or stay without any clear prospects. Those who stay in Zoti without work exert a negative influence on the pupils of the Zoti Public School. As a result, the pupils may not come to class or be unmotivated to learn. As I saw for myself, just around the corner from the Zoti Public School, a group of young males could be seen smoking, drinking and chatting with loud music coming from one of their cars. This was on a Wednesday, 4 April.

Such problems don't seem to play a role in the Khulo district. At least, none of the representatives of the district mentioned such problems, nor could I observe them myself. Also, the village I visited in the Khulo district did not seem to be that remote from neighbouring towns as Zoti is. On my way to Khulo, I passed villages where, outside of many administrative buildings, a US or EU flag could be seen. As I had been told, the US government and the EU have conducted some support programs in the region. All in all, youth unemployment in Zoti and its geographical remoteness from any (major) towns may contribute to the demotivation of pupils to learn languages, which has resulted in the choice for the neither language option for some respondents. Thus, in the Khulo and Chokhatauri districts, the use of language seems to correlate with economic factors outside the scope of this study.

When assessing the answers to question 4, 5a and 5b in Khulo and Chokhatauri, several things came up. It did not seem to make sense to calculate the average years of language study since the target group is of approximately the same age and thus has studied the languages for more or less the same amount of years. In Khulo, 11 respondents answered English (or Other) for question 4, 1 respondent answered Russian. 3 of the English language respondents know English from home (one respondent uses English in the family, the other knows it from TV and games). In the Chokhatauri district, 20 respondents answered English (or Other) for question 4, none answered Russian. Only one respondent said that he is studying with a private teacher.

For both districts, the levels of English and Russian indicated are not too different from those in the earlier sample. When accepted as more or less reliable, this means that in two very rural traditional places and roughly in the city, for young adults in that city environment and older school pupils in the countryside, additional languages are just as common. For the current generation (in the countryside) this level was reached at the end of the school age. It is not certain what is the contribution of the educational system and to what extent other means of communication (mass media, social media) count. It is also uncertain how the older generation in the city has in their time become acquainted with additional languages as we do not know how quickly the new media environment has developed in Georgia and particularly in Tbilisi in this case.

[How Russian and English is spoken](#)

[The online questionnaire and my own interactions](#)

Let us consider the answers to questions 1 and 2 that are about the speech situations in which language is used. I will firstly consider the answers to questions 1 and 2 for the online questionnaire

(‘Where do you use Russian?’ and ‘Where do you use English?’ respectively). Then I will assess my own observations and my daily interactions with others (referred to in Fig. 8 as ‘partners’). Finally, I will assess the answers to questions 1 and 2 for Khulo and Chokhatauri.

In Figure 7, a summary of the responses to the online questionnaire can be found. When looking at the figures, one can see that Russian language is mostly used at work (46.2%). English is mostly used at work (78.2%) and with friends (48.7%). Russian is used more than English in a family setting (25.6% against 12.6%). English is used more than Russian in university (38.5% against 11.5%). Also, English is used more extensively in the public space than Russian (35.9% against 15.4%). A problem for the respondents may have been the vagueness of the term ‘public space’, but I tried to define it more or less clearly by giving examples: ‘shopping, public transport, etc.’. Finally, a significant amount seems not to use Russian language in any of the listed social situations (30.8% against 5.1% for English)⁴.

Fig. 7:

	Russian (%)	English (%)
Work	46	78
Friends	24	49
University	12	39
Family	26	13
Public	15	36
No	31	5

The spoken language in Georgian towns is still often Georgian. A significant proportion of respondents does not indicate Russian in all suggested settings and English is, though very often spoken, relatively less used in general public settings. Most of the people in the sample use English or Russian at work and among friends, though English is much more frequently mentioned. While English is also a major means of communication in the university, Russian is still prominent in a number of families.

Thinking back to the responses to questions 5b (‘Did you study the language outside of school?’) one respondent said that Russian language is mostly used within the family. This may explain the questionnaire result that shows Russian is used more often than English in a family setting. Another respondent commented that Russian is also used on the web, with foreign visitors and Post-Soviet countries. Choosing Russian seems to be appropriate in social contexts other than the ones listed in the questionnaire. Fig. 8 shows what my own observations explain in this regard.

Fig.8:

⁴ One of the respondents commented: ‘I think, in questions such as “where do you use the foreign language” there has to be an option – Other. In the case of Russian, I selected “Don’t use at all” because I don’t use it in the given options, but I use it in web, with foreign visitors and in Post-Soviet countries’.

Language choice myself and partner	Both Russian (29x)	Both English (17x)	Me English, partner Russian (4x)	Me Russian, partner English (5x)
Cases	Taxi (6), Porters and guards (5), Shops (7),	NGO (6), hospitality sector (4)	Hospitality sector (3)	Hospitality sector (2)

I have 57 cases in the period 27 January 2018 - 20 February 2018. Observation and notes took place three times a week: on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The 57 cases cover a period of 12 days. I will look at the results of the section that shows the choice of language. Let us first consider the cases in which both me and the partner choose Russian. What are the patterns that can be observed here? Figure 9 shows my attempt to group the cases into certain categories⁵.

One can see that the hospitality sector features in all categories. This category has been challenging to define, since it includes, for example, both a McDonalds and a traditional Georgian eating establishment, a 'duqani'. The hospitality sector would in this case mean an establishment where one can order food, drinks and consume them there (with the exception of Goodwill Supermarket, which is primarily a supermarket, although there is a café section). Looking at the figure, one sees that Russian is used more often than English. At the same time, I have to adjust to the partner a bit more often when I choose Russian (5 against 4). In the Russian section, one of the biggest groups is taxi drivers. Although it does indeed seem to be the case that taxi drivers in general know better Russian than English, it must also be said that I use the YandexTaxi application, which is Russian. I often initiate the conversation in Russian with taxi drivers, porters and guards, shop keepers and shop assistants, as this seems to be convenient.

English is the norm in NGOs, primarily the GFSIS, where I was an intern during the writing of this research. In restaurants, often English is fine. But this seems to depend on the type of restaurants: some seem to be more known by Russian speaking tourists, others seem to be visited more often by English speakers. In Cafe Gabriadze (13 Shavteli St.) I chose English, but when the waitress saw I was looking at the Russian menu she was more than happy to switch to Russian. In a café on Leo Kiacheli St., I gave two waitresses the choice between English and Russian: one preferred Russian, while the other preferred English.

Another interesting case is the Ministry of Education, which I visited for an interview with one of the department heads for the purposes of this research. I asked the guard and the lady at the help desk whether they prefer English or Russian; they both preferred Russian. They redirected me to the second floor. Here I asked some senior staff for help, again both in English and Russian - they responded in English. The official voice speaks English, while 'the undercurrent' prefers Russian.

Another case is the Family Kitchen next to Marriott Hotel on Liberty Square. When I first came here, I chose Russian, but the response was in English. I accepted that and the next times I visited I spoke English. I gradually noticed a change of attitude towards me: they started to laugh when they saw me, but more jokingly than sympathetically. The reason was, perhaps, that I made a somewhat distracting appearance, not always paying attention to the way I look, being mentally occupied by work; also realising that I have a limited time for lunch. I quickly responded to their attitude of, perhaps, tacitly labelling me as 'a silly foreigner' by switching to Russian. The laughing and jokes stopped almost instantly. I experienced something similar on a holiday in Prague in 2014: entering a pub as an English speaking tourist, I was served a plate with two potatoes instead of a meal;

⁵ 2 out of 57 cases could not be grouped, since the responses did not respond in either English or Russian. This is why there are 55 cases in the figure.

when I asked the waiter in Russian what is going on, he immediately brought the meal that I ordered in the first place. This shows why, sadly for the wrong reasons, Russian seems to be more convenient than English, sometimes in both Georgia and the Czech Republic.

In conclusion, the answers to the online questionnaire confirm that English is a functional language, primarily a language of work and education, while Russian is a language used primarily within the family realm. My own observations add to this the social context of Russian and English language use, highlighting more than the people are willing or are able to highlight in their answers to the questionnaire. The observations show, firstly, that English and Russian are ‘fighting a battle,’ primarily in the hospitality sector, not only between certain establishments, but also within just one. They also show that the use of language correlates significantly with social class, type of job; this corresponds with my previous conclusion that the use of English depends on the place of residence, as English or both languages speakers tend to live in the ‘posh’ districts of Tbilisi. Finally, they show that choice of language not only depends on the knowledge of the language, but also on the effect that actors expect their language choice to have in a certain social situation.

The questionnaire in Khulo and Chokhatauri

Let us turn to the answers to questions 1 and 2 for Khulo and Chokhatauri (Fig. 9 and 10 respectively). In Khulo, Russian is used with friends (in combination with primarily family and public area). English features more prominently in the public area. Fewer respondents say they do not use English at all against those who do not use Russian at all.

With regards to Chokhatauri, it is noticeable that both Russian and English are used here in a lesser variety of different social situations than in Khulo. Furthermore, just as in Khulo, fewer say they do not use English at all against those who say they do not use Russian at all. Respondents mostly use English with friends and in the public area. Surprisingly, here English seems to be spoken more in the family (in combination with friends and the public area) than Russian, which is also spoken within the family.

Fig. 9:

Q1. Where do you use Russian language? (Khulo)

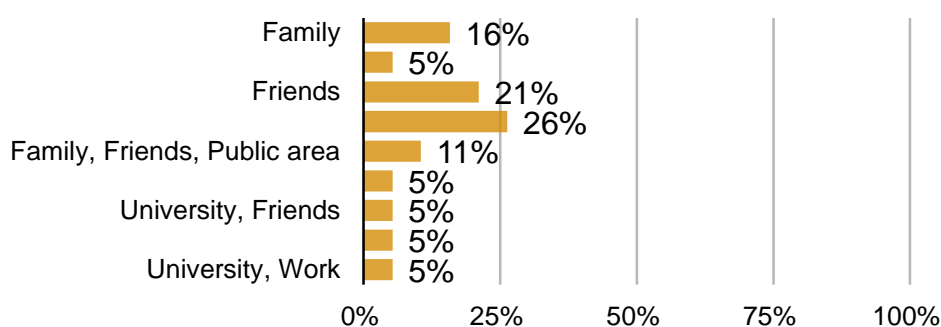
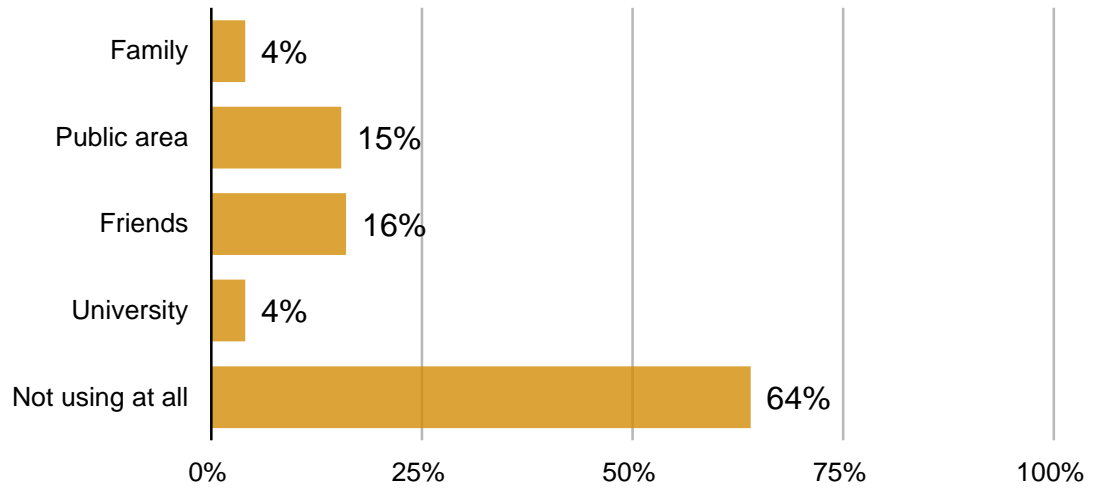
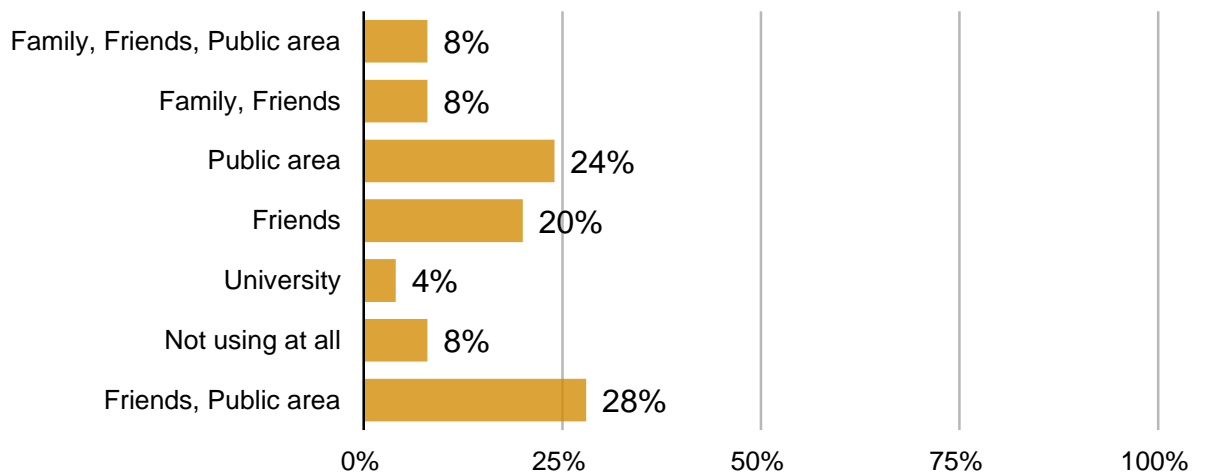


Fig.10:

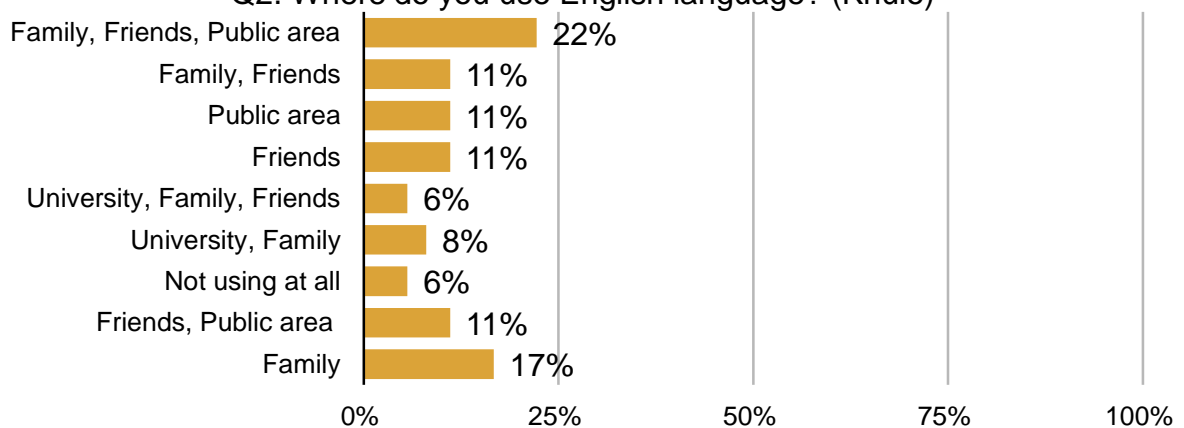
Q1. Where do you use Russian language? (Chokhatauri)



Q2. Where do you use English language? (Chokhatauri)



Q2. Where do you use English language? (Khulo)



All in all, Russian seems to feature more prominently in Khulo than in Chokhatauri, primarily within the family and with friends. In both Khulo and Chokhatauri, though, English seems to be a more functional language and is used primarily in the public area. It has to be said that for the respondents in Khulo and Chokhatauri, the work and university options are not relevant (I suppose that the 4% that chose the university option in Q2 of Chokhatauri understood by it for their secondary school education). I also suppose that the public area that is assumed by the respondents consists of social media and the town's limited facilities (limited when compared to Tbilisi).

All in all, the reason for the variety of options for both languages in Khulo could be the more accessible geographical position of the Khulo district compared to many villages in the Chokhatauri district, in particular the village of Zoti.

Conclusion

This is a first analysis of different types of data concerning the use of English and Russian in Georgia. It offers merely a series of primary distributions and averages to suggest explanations for the apparent shifts of the use of English and Russian underway throughout Georgian society.

It was initially suggested that the introduction of a new school curriculum in Georgia from 2006 onwards granting more space for the instruction of English, and providing Russian with a diminished overall profile might have resulted in a concurrent shift in the use of foreign languages. The average age of English and Russian language users provided a slightly different perspective. While indeed English language users were on average 10 years younger than those who used Russian, the average age of these English language users (28 years) suggested a somewhat earlier shift in that direction than the moment of the introduction of the National Curriculum. It also turned out that English language users to a considerable extent received their English language skills not only in secondary education, but also to a large extent at university and through private channels (tutor or language schools). It was also found that although most English speakers had taken English classes at school, a significant number of current frequent English speakers had in fact taken Russian (and not English) lessons at school. And finally, in one current school, pupils suggested that the quality of the English lessons they took at school were poor and they needed another type of instruction to use English in conversation.

In a sample mostly drawn from Tbilisi, it turned out that quite a large number of English speakers was living in a few of the most high-status city districts. The data suggest that there are relatively many women among Russian speakers and also perhaps more Russian speakers among those employed in the public sector.

In a sample of school pupils in two Georgian villages, the use of English was just as advanced as in the earlier generation that was portrayed in the Tbilisi sample. As universities, private tutors and language schools have so far been out of reach in this instance, the school - despite complaints about the quality of the instruction - must have been important, but youth also suggested the direct influence of, for example, social media and games for the current generation.

Finally, the actual use of Russian and English in exchanges between the researcher and different interlocutors that he came across during his stay in Georgia were collected in a database. It turned out that apart from the prescribed categories to mark the social situation in which these

exchanges occurred, a number of additional considerations apparently played out in such interactions. These can be brought back to the shared history of Russia and Georgia and the attitudes to and knowledge of Russian and Russians that have resulted from this shared history and can be observed in the current context.

When assessing future trends, a discussion I recently observed in Georgia may be of help. In the introduction, the current threat of Russian propaganda was briefly mentioned. In a series of lectures on strategy delivered at the GFSIS in Tbilisi, the optimal Georgian strategy towards Russian propaganda activities were considered. Two different strategies came up: one in which 'time is on our side' and another in which 'time is our enemy'. Those engaging in strategy can choose from either option. It was mentioned that under the current government in Georgia, the first strategy is pursued when it comes to Euro-Atlantic integration, whereas under the Saakashvili government, the second strategy was pursued, as any delay in the integration process was considered harmful for Georgia. One lecture participant brought up an interesting point, suggesting that the same strategy should be adopted with regards to the contested Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. According to the participant, Russian language use is reducing: surveys seem to show that even in the minority regions, where Russian language was always much more practiced, Russian media use is declining, being replaced by media in either the minority's native Armenian or Azeri language, and being broadcasted by the Georgian side. With time, this would create some sort of sufficient conditions that would make Russia less attractive and turn the breakaway regions towards Georgia.

As a response, another participant asked, why not knowing Russian well would be positive. 'Knowing your enemy' is essential in Georgia's case. Furthermore, the participant said that she was surprised to observe the increased Russian presence in Georgia over the last couple of years, in both business and tourism.

This discussion is partly reflected in the online responses to question 6 and 7 of the questionnaire: 'Which language would you like your child to study? English, Russian or Other' and 'Which language would you choose to improve at this moment of your life? English, Russian or Other'. The majority (84.6%) claims that they want their child to study English against 2.6 % for Russian. At the same time, 32.1% of the respondents would choose to improve their Russian language skills at this point in their life against 44.9% for English. So it seems that the current young generation in Georgia definitely prefers English to Russian; it is thought that English will be much more useful than Russian for the upcoming generations. In this way, our respondents make assessments about future language processes. They think it is now useful to improve their Russian, but consider it to be more useful in a long-time perspective to focus on English.

All in all, at this point, Georgia seems on some sort of crossroads when it comes to Russian and English language use. On Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi, I helped two construction workers to pick up one of their tools. One said 'Thank you', the other 'Spasibo'. This research attempted to show and explain something about the current state of English and Russian language use.

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