

SOME LEXICAL FEATURES OF THE SPEECH OF THE GHORJOMI GORGE

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Abstract: Ajarian holds a prominent position among the Georgian dialects. It is distinguished by significant dialectal differentiation and is notably rich in subdialects. Like all living linguistic systems, the Ajarian dialect is subject to constant change, with lexical shifts being particularly pronounced, given that vocabulary is the most dynamic component of language. The study of the dialect's lexicon remains a consistently valuable endeavor, providing both scholarly interest and new linguistic insights.

The detailed study of dialects assigns particular significance to localized research, as it elucidates specific speech forms and features, thereby contributing to the comprehensive and nuanced portrayal of a given dialect. The present study, „Some Lexical Features of the Speech of the Ghorjomi Valley,“ focuses on the lexical characteristics of the speech of the inhabitants of the Ghorjomi Valley – a distinct and emblematic subregion of Upper Ajara. To date, the speech of the Ghorjomi Valley has remained relatively underexplored within Georgian dialectology. This research is grounded in empirical data collected through fieldwork conducted by the author in the valley. A localized, discourse-level investigation of the Ghorjomi speech reveals numerous noteworthy lexical strata. In many instances, elements that appear to have faded from the standard literary language persist in the dialectal forms, thereby enriching our understanding of linguistic continuity and variation.

The lexical material of the Ghorjomi Valley is distinguished by the presence of archaic words and lexical dialectisms, alongside traces of a Zan (Megrelian-Laz) substratum. Foreign lexical elements are also frequent, reflecting the historical and cultural processes that have unfolded in the region over time.

Key words: Dialectal Lexicon; Archaic Vocabulary; Lexical Dialectisms; Foreign Lexical Elements.

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Introduction. The Georgian literary language is rich in dialects, and dialectological research serves as one of the primary means for the comprehensive study of the Georgian language. Among the various Georgian dialects, the Ajarian dialect holds a particularly significant place.

As is well known, like other dialects, Ajarian also exhibits dialectal differentiation, which is primarily determined by natural and geographic conditions. The villages in this region are not closely connected to one another, resulting in noticeable variation in their speech – most prominently observed in the lexicon. The Ajarian dialect is characterized by a rich diversity of subdialects. Accordingly, localized studies of the dialect are of particular importance for the comprehensive investigation of dialectal vocabulary. Observing speech at the local level – especially by valleys – reveals numerous nuances and distinctive features, thereby contributing to a more detailed linguistic portrait. At times, dialects preserve and safeguard lexical elements that appear to be forgotten or obsolete in the literary language. Therefore, the observation and study of dialectal vocabulary consistently offer new insights and remain highly relevant. The aim of the present study is to explore the lexical particularities of speech in the Ghorjomi Valley – one of the most distinctive and characteristic areas of mountainous Ajara.

The Ghorjomi community is located in Ajara, approximately 15 kilometers from Khulo, and comprises 18 villages, making it one of the most populous communities in the region. It is also one of the oldest settlements in mountainous Ajara.

The speech of the Ghorjomi Valley has been relatively underexplored. Therefore, its investigation is both necessary and essential for completing the dialectal profile of Ajara and, more broadly, of south-western Georgia. It is also important to consider that the Ajarian dialect is in a constant state of change, with such changes primarily reflected in the lexicon – the most dynamic component of language.

In Upper Ajara, and particularly in the Ghorjomi Valley, many archaic forms have survived, though they are gradually disappearing and are now mostly preserved in the speech of the elderly. Consequently, it is imperative to document and systematically analyze these elements.

The localized study of this dialect and the speech of individual valleys thus plays a significant role in tracing linguistic change within both the Georgian literary language and its historical dialects.

Observation of the speech in the Ghorjomi Valley has enabled the identification of numerous lexical particularities. Notable is the lexical diversity, with layers of Old and Middle Georgian vocabulary still actively used in contemporary spoken language. A significant number of lexical dialectisms are present, alongside traces of a Zan (Mingrelian-Laz) substratum. Additionally, borrowings from foreign languages – particularly Turkish, Arabic, and Persian – are clearly evident. Such studies make it possible to uncover both previously undocumented and long-forgotten lexical units.

Methodology. The study is based on empirical material recorded by the authors in the Ghorjomi Valley. The research employs methods of empirical data processing, analysis, description, evaluation, and comparison.

Archaic Lexical Units in the Speech of the Ghorjomi Valley. The study of the lexicon of Upper Ajarian speech offers insights of considerable interest. Among these, the identification of Old Georgian lexical strata within the dialectal vocabulary constitutes a key precondition for exploring the historical development of the dialect.

The speech of Ghorjomi Valley inhabitants is particularly notable for its abundance of lexical archaisms.

The verb form „mtsadia“ is heard regularly in the speech of the region. Although this verb no longer appears in Modern Georgian literary language, it remains in active use among speakers of the Upper Ajarian dialect. The Ajarian form „tsad“ corresponds to the Old Georgian verb root tsad-. Examples include m-tsad-i-a (“I desire”) and g-tsad-i-a (“you desire”). A comparable form exists in Svan, where had (as in na-had-u, meaning „desired“ or „longed-for“) serves a similar semantic function (Noghaideli, 2004:49).

In Upper Ajarian, the term **kidobani** is used to refer to a container for storing flour. In Old Georgian lexicons, **kidobani** denoted a chest or box. For example: „kidobanidan chavkh’rdit da modioda ikidan simindi“ (“We would scoop it from the kidobani, and corn would come out”) (Saba; Abul.; KEGL).

In the speech of the elderly, the word **pertskhali** is frequently used to denote the **rib**. For instance: „Gamouges pertskali, ikidan gaachina kali, romelits iko Heva anamusi“ (“He took out the rib, and from it created the woman who was Eve the firstborn”). In the Old Georgian lexicon and in Saba’s Dictionary of Words, pertskhali is defined as „guerdi“, referring to the side or the rib of the body (Abuladze, 1973; Saba, 1943).

Archaic forms are frequently encountered in local speech. We will now present several examples: **beri, apauri, kanughi, nokhari, echo, qavari, kharo, jilgha...**

Lexical Dialectisms in the Speech of the Ghorjomi Gorge. Alongside the lexical units found in various dialects of the Georgian language, we encounter lexical dialectisms that are distinctive to Ajarian and, naturally, to the speech of the Ghorjomi Gorge. These words do not have parallels in other dialects or, if parallels exist, they differ significantly in their semantic nuances. For illustration, we present the following examples:

Amojamva – rounding, smoothing out. “Supra mak erti, khidan ari gamot’lili, amojamuli ak gverdebi“ (“I have a table, carved from wood; its sides are rounded.”).

Badadebi – rags, scraps of cloth. „Tskhens apers ar moabemden. Badadeb sheabmen“ (“They didn’t tie anything proper to the horse – just scraps of cloth”).

Bebrevti – mother’s ancestral homeland (matrilineal origin).

Bidzini – faith, belief. „Shen shens bidzins rom ar karkav da imprat iarebi“ (“Because you don’t keep to your faith, you wander around in vain”).

Similar lexemes include: Daktsnili, Kutilamba, Patsatsala, Sachite, Sikhma, Sanametro, Dzeridede, Tsde...

The Zan Substrate in the Speech of the Ghorjomi Gorge. The Zan language played a significant role in the development of the western dialects of Georgian. Traces of the Zan substrate remain clearly observable in Ajarian vocabulary to this day. As Nizharadze notes, „This is to be expected, as like Gurian, Ajarian is situated along the Black Sea coast, where the Zan population resided continuously“ (Nizharadze, 1971). Elements of the Zan substrate can also be found in the speech of the Ghorjomi Gorge. The following examples are presented for illustration:

Badishi – grandchild. „Tamunai chemi gogoidan badishia.“ (“Tamuna is my granddaughter from my daughter”).

Bogi / Boga – a large tree. „Bogas davdgamdit, boga didi khea, did ch’ers daasobden da shua zeit deidgebden t’ivas.“ (“We would place the boga – a large tree trunk – as the main beam, and they’d stack hay in the middle, above it”).

K’erechi – crust or outer layer (of cornbread, bread, wood, or skin). „Khapi isaa, skheli k’erechi rom ak.“ (“Khapi is that – the thick crust it has”) (Saba; KEGL; Futk).

Foreign Lexical Elements in the speech of the Ghorjomi Gorge. The Ajarian dialect has been influenced by the Turkish language for centuries, and this influence is most visibly reflected in its vocabulary. Religious rituals were traditionally performed in Arabic and Turkish, which naturally led to the spread of Turkish customs in everyday Ajarian life. The performance of these customs, in turn, required the use of relevant Arabic vocabulary. In this way, Eastern lexical elements entered the Ajarian dialect. Turkish, Arabic, and Persian vocabulary is abundantly present in the speech of the Ghorjomi Gorge.

Lexical borrowings from Turkish:

Anjakh (Turk.) – barely, with great difficulty. **Bajiko** (Turk.) – sister, dear sister; **Gelini** (Turk.) – bride, daughter-in-law. **Demirchi** (Turk.) – blacksmith. **Mertegi** (Turk.) – grave plank and others.

Lexical borrowings from Arabic:

Adeti (arab.) – custom. **Gameraqianeba** (arab.) – to become sorrowful. **Teqmili** (arab.) – complete, **Selgahi** (arab.) – flood. **Janaza** (arab.) – funeral prayer and others.

Lexical borrowings from Persian:

Akhori (pers.) – cattle shed. **Bet’i** (pers.) – ugly. **Biberi** (pers.) – pepper. **Chivti** (pers.) – a pair and others.

It is noteworthy that words of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian origin are primarily found in the speech of the elderly, and in some cases appear alongside native Georgian equivalents. Examples of such lexical items include *altuni* (gold), *gugumi* (copper pot), *deli* (mad), *dunia* (world), and others.

Conclusion: A localized, gorge-based study of Upper Ajarian speech at the level of verbal expression reveals numerous notable lexical layers. Many archaic words that are absent from or forgotten in the standard literary language remain alive in the speech of the Ghorjomi Gorge. A wide range of lexical dialectisms emerges, and traces of a Zan substrate are clearly observable. The presence of Arabic and Persian vocabulary – introduced through Turkish influence – is explained by historical contact with foreign languages. The localized study of dialectal vocabulary serves as a means of identifying new or forgotten lexical items, providing a foundation for enriching the lexicon of the Georgian literary language.

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