

TERMS OF KINSHIP IN HISTORICAL AND MODERN MESKHETI (Comparative Analysis of Our Collected Materials)

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Abstract: The article investigates the linguistic structure of kinship terminology in the historical and geographical region of Meskheta, based on empirical data from the Adjarian and Imerkhevi dialects. The research aims to reveal linguistic, sociocultural, and semantic transformations within the kinship lexicon that reflect the ethnolinguistic dynamics of the region. The study employs descriptive, historical-comparative, and ethnolinguistic methodologies, relying on field materials collected during expeditions conducted between 1992 and 2024.

The analysis demonstrates that Meskhetian kinship terminology represents a synthesis of archaic Georgian lexical layers and external (primarily Turkish) influences. Borrowed terms such as *kardashi*, *bibi*, *gelin*, *dede*, *hala*, and *kirve* have been assimilated into the local linguistic system, frequently undergoing semantic adaptation. Particular attention is devoted to terms denoting clan and genealogical structures (*gobegi*, *ch'ipi*, *motchdoma*), which illustrate the continuity and resilience of the traditional Georgian family model.

The findings confirm that, despite external linguistic interference, the Meskhetian dialectal environment has preserved the essential semantic and cultural codes of the Georgian language. Consequently, kinship terminology functions not only as a linguistic category but also as a key marker of cultural memory and ethnolinguistic identity.

Key words: kinship terminology, Meskheta, Adjarian dialect, Imerkhevi speech, ethnolinguistics, Turkish borrowings, cultural memory.

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Introduction: Like in all cultured nations, Georgian language, besides its native lexemes, contains vocabulary from various countries. The formal and semantic diversity of borrowed lexemes was determined by interactions with different ethnicities during various historical periods. Georgia could not be an exception, considering its political history.

In historical and modern Meskheta, this ancient region of Georgia where Turkish politics and ideology dominated for a long time, it is natural to find lexical units borrowed from Turkish. Verbal forms with Georgian affixes are also attested.

Review of Sources/Literature: Numerous researchers have addressed this issue (M. Jikia, M. Paghava...), and we also utilized materials collected during our various expeditions.

The primary sources for research in linguistics as a system, lexicology and lexicography, as well as ethnology, history, political, geographical, and other scientific directions are dictionary units. We have collected dozens of dictionary materials from various historical-ethnographic regions of Georgia since 1992.

This time, based on the conference content, we have compiled and present for discussion the kinship vocabulary recorded during our expeditions (Adjara, Adigeni):

For the future, we plan to study the ethnolinguistic vocabulary we have collected from different regions of Georgia at different times from both ethnological and linguistic perspectives.

Methodology: The paper employs descriptive and historical-comparative methods.

Discussion/Results: We note that for all terms and expressions we discuss, we present the latest ethnographic materials, and these materials will serve as reliable sources for various fields of science.

The analyzed material can be divided into 3 groups:

1. Lexemes found only in Adjarian and Imerkhevian dialects;
2. Lexemes that also appear in Meskhetian-Javakhian dialects;
3. Lexemes that are attested in other dialects according to dialectal dictionaries, and also appear in Sulkhan-Saba's dictionary and the explanatory dictionary.

1. Lexemes found only in Adjarian and Imerkhevian dialects:

Kardashi – The Taoans know about „blood brother“/**zurgmikudebeli dzmadnapitsi**: „Dzmadnapitsi is a person to rely on. My blood brothers are: Sherip, Mustafa, Nejat. Zurgmisakudebeli, they always need you, you hide them, but don't betray“ (Bichak Chilari, Tao expedition, 2022).

For denoting „zurgmikudebeli dzmadnapitsi“ in Tao, they use the dialectal form **kardash** of „kardeshi“ which denotes a child of same parents. (kardeş – Turkish. literally means taking an oath, sworn brother)

Dzudzunatsovnebi: „Mother went to the forest. She was late. I was crying and **Fatma khala (/bitsola)** breastfed me. She is my mother; her children are my brothers. A woman works, leaves child at home. Another breastfeeds and that's why there are more dzudzunatsovnebi“ (**Khikhadziri-Tao**).

For comparison: A new member of the family (adopted, accepted for various reasons, „zedsidze“. The sworn brother had unrestricted rights – „kerdzi“(Imereti, Racha)/„**kerdzmokete**“(Racha), „**kerdz-modjgire**“ in Samegrelo – emphasis ours) was a full member of the inherited social unit in property-rights issues. They had inheritance rights to the immovable and movable property of the family and community where they would live. Adoption was also often a means of survival for the adopting family/household. For the adopting family, caring for an adopted child is a special duty.

Ethnographic material:

The Kheladzes of Zulukheli consider Evgeni Kheladze's adopted Janelidzes as relatives: „Not only adopted ones, but also those accepted into the family and zedsidze were not made to change their surnames. Simon Khavtasi (the surname must have existed in the form Khavtaisdze in the 13th century) raised his daughter's son Dukhuna and now there's a Bagdavadze household there“; „Revaz, Bruzhaki and Gusein Gujedjani, who were left without parents from Cholashi, were raised by their aunt's family in Lemzagori“; A family of the Kordzadze surname, derived from the personal name „Kordzi“ created based on physical characteristics, from Tsikhesulori raised a Nikoleishvili, kept their surname. Meliton Kordzadze raised his grandchild and today they are Tkeshelashvili at the homestead.

A daughter and son of dedia(/deida) are relatives. Only that they distinguish two forms of address: **moodar** and **maaman**. This maaman form is endearing and they use it more in childhood. Later a person (person, here meaning human-emphasis ours) won't say the endearing maaman, later **moodar**.

The second important circumstance. They only address this way to blood-related aunt and not to a woman who grew up with mother, a neighbor woman...

When discussing this term, it was revealed that **gagineba** in Fereidianian has two meanings: 1. Tell the truth; 2. Same as in Georgia, but only in extreme anger. For the second rule of Fereidianian cursing. Here, especially in lowland Georgia, cursing the mother and cursing-swearing about mother is still active. In Fereidianian Georgians, cursing a woman is forbidden, because she is namus, mother, is a man in the house (in the meaning of human-emphasis ours), is dedakatsi.

Ethnographic material:

“Gagineba is when you fight and not here when you curse in a fight, and don’t say kral(/bad) word. Gagineba shows what culture is, how they respect each other. Not cursing woman, mother. Whoever curses woman will go to prison. Woman is your namus. Local namus is different, they curse often. In our place they only say namus about woman and girl, not about boy. Most important is namus, to be looked after. Respect namus, don’t curse it, curse me, make me understand in a manly way. Wife is dedakatsi. They love very much because she is mother and man in house. Man, meaning mother is everything in house, one who pays attention to work. You’re not there, she does manning too. Man sleeps at night, dedakatsi does everything. That Georgia stands on its feet is thanks to dedakatsi. How would there be warrior in our place, good man, if woman wasn’t good. In our place because that’s how they taught us, it’s Georgian rule (accuracy of thought preserved. Speech not completely – emphasis ours) (Ibrahim Aslani. Giorgi Onikashvili, Fereidianian Georgian, recorded in Kutaisi. 13.09 2024.)

Gobegi – It is noted in scientific literature that in Upper Adjara „gobegi“ (from Turkish gobek, meaning navel) is a term denoting generation. The names of family branches of Adjarian and Imerkhevian Georgians „gobegi“, „gonarigi“, are identical to „gvarziebi“, „motskdomi“, „ancestral name“, „antobi“, „neki“, „chipi“/“chipi dzmobi“, „sabudebeli“, „monatsveti“/“motskdomi“, „family certificate“ attested in all historical-ethnographic units of Georgia, and the term documented by ethnologist Nugzar Mgeladze in the „Chveneburni“ of Tao-Klarjeti.

Ethnographic material:

“The pre-Turkish **Chelebadze** (<-Cheleba) residents of Didachara became „Cheleboglu“ during Turkish rule. Russian rule named all „jishi“ and „gonarigi“ living in the Chelebadze neighborhood district as Gobadze. **Chelebadze** was retained as the name of „gonarigi“ (Shavianidze, 2009:165).

Extended citation: Tao-Klarjetian settlement – **village** (in Turkish **koi**) united localized kinship – genealogical groups. Here we do not find surname expressed in classical meaning, but rather we had patronymic organization, which consisted of genealogical groups descended from one common ancestor. Today they are called by more common term --“**sulale**“, and in Klarjeti also „**kebile**“. Alongside **sulale** and **kebile** in Klarjeti we documented Georgian term – **motskdoma** denoting small genealogical group of traditional patronymic organization, previously unknown to Georgian ethnology. „**Motskdoma**“ carries the meaning of breaking off from something, segmentation from something, more precisely, the inner content of segmented branch and directly conveys the inner essence of genealogical branching of patronymic organization as a social union, writes N. Mgeladze (2024. p.121-134).

Ethnographic material:

“Branch is blood part of surname, both surname and branch are one motskdoma, one sabudebeli (narrator G. Kirkitadze. Mukhura. 1993).

“All ‘turi’ of surname came from foundation, nest of my surname, lives separately, maybe far away, but is yours (narrator Z. Gabelaia“. Noghokha).

Chipi – In the explanatory dictionary of Georgian language this term means the place where seed is attached to fruit walls, in Upper Imerian it means a piece, fragment of newly made cheese (Dzotsenidze, 1974.)

In Upper Adjara they say: „People of one chipi“, „chipi brothers“(/““blood brothers“), meaning part of one. Absolutely similar, they are one, they'll tell you in Imereti, Samegrelo [(they are brothers of one chipi//art chupash djimalep renia;]{.underline} they are like that when they're together/arto renani eperepi/arto mulani eperepi), in Svaneti (“samkhub mekhubaral“/“tsama lakhuba“) and generally in Georgia; they'll also tell you that it's „one monatsveti“, „tskeba“ people“.

Compare, in Lechkhumi **motskebuli** – this is another tskeba, part but yours (<https://www.ena.ge/explanatory-online>)

According to the opinion expressed in scientific literature that should be shared, „**ganakari**“, „**branch families**“ may live far from old house (Georgians, 2016: 366), however this doesn't mean distancing from „gonarigi“, „gamrigo“ „monatsdomi“ etc. „sabudebeli“, for the purpose of exclusion. Even living far away, member of „sakhlobi“ social unit is understood as part of „dziri“.

“**Sakhli**“, „**dzudzunatsovari**“, „**zurgmikudebeli**“

Being one „sakhli“, foundation(/““**dziri-sad**“) in Adjara Islamized by enemy and „Chveneburni“ cut off from Georgia is identical to Georgian traditional, national-cultural, way of living established by „**kora**“, rule of living undivided/“**jilagobi rule**“.

Ethnographic material:

“Sakhli is name of foundation's branches, dzmanishvili, blood relations and not just dwelling, it's mind and strength of all members of entire sabudebeli (narrator J. Katamadze. Dzuknuri 1995).

“**Sakhli**“ – „kor“ in Svan family speech is foundation of one grandfather „**khosha hoker**“, from which come several families. Denotes my blood and flesh, my character.

Bibi – Aunt, father's sister (bibi, hala). Found in Adjarian dialect, also carries same meaning in Imerkhebian, where its synonymous version appears as **bibila**.

Gelini – Daughter-in-law (gelin). Found in Adjarian dialect, used with same meaning in Imerkhebian dialect.

Dede – Grandfather (dede). Found in Adjarian dialect. In Shushana Putkaradze's dictionary it's noted that in Imerkhebian its first meaning is grandfather, papa; second meaning denotes ancestor; and third meaning is defined as sheikh of Shiite Muslims.

Khala – (hala – father's sister) Mother's sister. This word appears in both Adjarian and Tao-Imerkhebian dialects.

Taoan ethnographic material:

“Mother went to valley, I was wrapped in cradle. I got hungry started crying. Neighbor Fatma **khalai** came, breastfed me and her child is my dzudzunatsovari.

Taoan „**dzudzunatsovari**“ and Tao-Imerkhebian „**zurgmikudebeli**“/blood brother, artificially acquired relative, friend, is identical to all-Georgian „dzmadnapitsi“, Svan **shikhlachd/zurgmisakudebeli**.

Shikhlachd – Someone to lean back on, reliable, standing by in sorrow-joy, while **shikhlachd kor** – back supporters, is of your house, with whom, as they say „we hold hand on one stick“. In Svan **eshkhu paus labrgad**.

Kirva – Godfather (kirve). Man who holds boy during circumcision. Analog of Christian godfather. Attested with same meaning in Imerkhebian.

2. Lexemes that also appear in Meskhetian-Javakhian dialects:

Balduzi – Wife's sister (baldiz). Found in Adjarian, Imerkhebian and attested with same meaning in Javakhian dictionary.

Bajanaghi – Brother-in-law (bacanak). Found in Adjarian dialect. Recorded with same meaning in Javakhian dictionary.

Kaini – (kayin). Wife's brother, brother-in-law. It's a Turkish word. This word is attested with same meaning in Javakhian dictionary.

3. **Lexemes that are attested in other dialects according to dialectal dictionaries, and also appear in Sulkhan-Saba's dictionary and the explanatory dictionary:**

Badishi – Grandchild. This word appears with same meaning in Adjarian, Gurian and Imerian dialects. This term is not found in I. Abuladze's Old Georgian Dictionary, but we have badeba, which means birth. We think it must be connected to this word.

Ethnographic material:

For example, my family's badishi are my sister's children! Länbäshna! (narrator Ts. Guledani. Lenjeri. 2024).

Baba – Father (baba). This word appears with equal meaning in Imerkhebian as well as Adjarian, Gurian, Imerian and Megrelian. In Adjarian it also appears in form „**baboi**“.

Ethnographic material:

“You know my wedding? Stalin died and wedding was postponed because „**baboi**“ died, they hung Stalin's picture and if wedding was on first, we had it on twentieth. It was like that everywhere. Baboi, they made everyone cry (narrator S. Putkaradze. Erdvati. 2018)“. Appears in form „**babaia**“ in Megrelian speech.

In Zurab Kiknadze's „Andrezi“ word „mama“ – besides parent, is defined as 1) branch of one surname, 2) one generation: „In their „mama“ no one person will be lost who serves crosses“ (p. 85), „Our old surname is Gigauri, household surname by „mama“ – Zviadauri“ (p.123), „Person, will proclaim, will exile you with your „mama“-surname“ (p.177) (Kiknadze, 2009)

Ana – Mother (anne). Word appears in Adjarian dialect, used with same meaning in Imerkhebian dialect. Attested in Sulkhan-Saba with following meanings: mother, parent, stepmother, queen, female, mother-in-law,...

Nene – Appears in Georgian language dictionary meaning mother. Also appears with same meaning in Gurian, Upper Adjarian and Imerkhebian. In Shushana Putkaradze nene is both mother and grandmother. In speech of muhajirs from Chakvi, Kobuleti, Khelvachauri means mother, in descendants of Upper Adjara muhajirs they call grandmother nene. **Ethnographic material:** „Big nenes“ created names of many places, other men. Given meaning. Said name, they gave. Meaning of name not forgotten until now“.

Conclusion: Based on presented research we can summarize:

1. Kinship terminology in historical and modern Meskheta is diverse and reflects the region's complex historical-cultural development.

2. Turkish language influence is especially evident in terms such as: kardashi, bibi, gelini, dede, khalala, kirva and others. However, these terms are integrated into local cultural context and often acquire connotations different from original.

3. Particularly noteworthy are terms related to surname branches and kinship connections (gobegi, chipi, motskdoma), indicating vitality of traditional Georgian family system.

4. Research revealed that some terms (e.g., badishi, baba, ana, nene) have all-Georgian character and appear in various dialects, indicating unity of Georgian linguistic space.

5. Analysis of ethnographic material shows that kinship terms are not only linguistic but important socio-cultural phenomenon reflecting society's values and social relationships.

6. Research confirms that despite influence of foreign languages, Georgian linguistic and cultural traditions are preserved in Meskheta, which is especially well seen in kinship terminology.

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