

# LEGAL REGULATION AND PRACTICE OF USING THE GEORGIAN LANGUAGE AS THE STATE LANGUAGE IN PUBLIC INFORMING

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**Abstract.** Language is the primary form of human identity and cultural belonging, and one of the fundamental attributes of a state's constitutional-legal status. The state language is a socially protected good whose use and development constitutes an important state function.

This paper is dedicated to the legal regulation, practice, and recommendations concerning the use of the Georgian language, as the state language, in the sphere of public information. It analyzes trends in the narrowing of the Georgian language's functional domain and the dangers of linguistic degradation, which are particularly evident in written communication intended for public information purposes.

The study examines the legal regulations governing the use of the Georgian language in announcements, headings, posters, signs, billboards, advertisements, and other texts carrying visual information intended for public information. It analyzes the practice of violating the relevant norms of Georgian legislation.

The research findings indicate that despite existing legal and institutional mechanisms, violations of regulations regarding state language use continue to be recorded, caused by low levels of legal awareness, certain ambiguities in the normative framework, and insufficient effectiveness of sanctions. The paper develops recommendations aimed at refining legal regulations and strengthening the protection and promotion of the state language.

**Keywords:** State language of Georgia; public information; inscriptions intended for public information; State Language Department.

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**Introduction.** Scholars actively discuss various threats to language (Arabuli, 2013: 258; Gigashvili, 2010: 157–158; Gorgoshidze, 2018; Javelidze, 2022: 14–17; Asatiani, 2025). The reduction of domains in which a language is used is cited as one of the symptoms of language death (Gigashvili, 2011: 79–80). Unfortunately, the functional domain of the Georgian language is being restricted in both spoken and written communication. This indicates that the Georgian language - as a phenomenon expressing Georgia's historical, cultural, political, and legal heritage and way of life - requires special care, which is reflected in the adoption of the Organic Law of Georgia "On the State Language" (2015), the establishment of the public legal entity known as the State Language Department (2017), the development of the Unified State Language Program (Strategy) for 2021–2030, and other state measures aimed at: Consolidating the constitutional status of the state language, Establishing the legal foundations for its use and protection, Regulating legal relations connected to the functioning of state and non-state languages, Ensuring the protection and promotion of the

constitutional status of the state language within the limits set by Georgian legislation, Establishing and entrenching the norms of standard literary Georgian, and other objectives.

Written communication constitutes one major sphere of language use, and within written communication, announcements, headings, posters, signs, billboards, advertisements, and other visual information texts intended for public information occupy a significant place. Despite Georgian legislation establishing legal regulations for this sphere, numerous instances of their violation occur in practice. This article examines and analyzes violations of the regulations provided by Georgian legislation regarding written communication in Georgian in public information texts - announcements, headings, posters, signs, billboards, advertisements, and other visual information - and develops certain recommendations.

**Methods:** The study employs descriptive, focused, and selective observation, source analysis, systematic analysis, cause-and-effect, and analogy methods.

### **Main violations observed on public information signs**

A large part of the texts intended for public information, headlines, posters, signs, billboards, advertisements and other visual information grossly violate:

a) Article 24, paragraphs 3, 5, 6 of Article 25 of the Organic Law of Georgia “On the State Language” of July 22, 2015;

b) Article 4, paragraphs 1, 2, 2<sup>1</sup>, 3, 4 of Article 4 of the Law of Georgia “On Advertising” of February 18, 1998, paragraph 2 of Article 6 and paragraph 1 of Article 7;

c) Article 144<sup>10</sup> of the Code of Administrative Offenses of Georgia;

d) Article 51<sup>1</sup> of the Law of Georgia “On Broadcasting” of December 23, 2004.

Let's follow it article by article and show what is provided for in which article and what types of violations we are dealing with in practice.

Article 24 of the Organic Law of Georgia “On the State Language” establishes: “The text of an announcement, notice, headline, poster, sign, billboard, advertisement, and other visual information intended for public information shall be completed in the state language. If necessary, the relevant information may also be indicated in a non-state language, and in a municipality where representatives of a national minority live compactly, also in the language of this national minority.” As we can see, according to this article, the text of an announcement, notice, headline, poster, sign, billboard, advertisement, and other visual information intended for public information shall be completed in the state language, i.e. Georgian, and if necessary, the same information may also be indicated in a non-state language.

This requirement of the law is not fulfilled in most cases (Program Report, 2017), many statements, notices, headlines, posters, signs, billboards, advertisements and other visual information texts intended for public information are made only in a foreign language and the state language is not used, which naturally limits the scope for the use of the Georgian language. Article 24 of the Organic Law of Georgia “On the State Language” does not directly mention means of transport in the list of texts intended for public information, as it seems that the mentioned means are implied in the “and others” of this article. Given that the use of vehicles for public information is increasing, it is advisable to add the words “including on vehicles” to the list of the aforementioned article and formulate it as follows: “The text of an announcement, notice, headline, poster, signboard, billboard, advertisement, other visual information intended for public information, including on vehicles, shall be completed in the state language...”. As mentioned, the Organic Law of Georgia “On the State Language” requires that the text of an announcement, notice, headline, poster, sign, billboard, advertisement, or other visual information intended for public information be in the state language (Georgia, 2015: M.25, p.1). However, if it is in the interests of the compiler of the text of an announcement, notice,

headline, poster, sign, billboard, advertisement, or other visual information intended for public information to be in a language other than the state language, the law introduces the following regulation: "If necessary, it may also be presented in a non-state language." The law does not specify what is meant by "case of necessity", the legislator entrusts the definition of such cases to the creator of the text intended for public information, i.e. does not limit him in determining what he will consider a "case of necessity" (for comparison: the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Language" allows the placement of information intended for public information in a non-state language in cases of necessity (Law, 1993: Art. 4, Clause 3), while the Law of Azerbaijan "On the State Language in the Republic of Azerbaijan" allows this in areas related to services for foreigners (Закон, 2002: Art. 7, Clause 1)). In the event that it is deemed necessary to place the text in a non-state language for public information purposes and if this applies to the official title in cases provided for by law, according to the Organic Law of Georgia "On the State Language", the following requirements must be observed: if the text in the state language and the text in a non-state language are placed side by side, then the text in the state language is placed in front, that is, on the left, and then, on the right, the text in the non-state language; in the event that the text in the state language and the text in the non-state language are placed above and below, then the text in the state language is placed above, and the text in the non-state language is placed below (Georgia, 2015: M.25, p.3). In cases other than the official title, the text in the state language is placed before (on the left or above) the text in the non-state language (Georgia, 2015: M.25, p.5).

Considering that in Georgia, along with Georgian, Abkhazian is also the state language in Abkhazia, when translating the official name into Georgian, Abkhazian and non-state languages, the Georgian text is placed in front (left or top), the Abkhazian text is placed in the center, and the text in a non-state language is placed after (right or bottom) (Georgia, 2015: M.25, p.4). The above regulations are violated in various ways: a) there is a foreign-language inscription above and below or on the left and right, in the middle there is Georgian, and sometimes something else is written in Georgian, and something else in foreign; b) the name of the firm or facility is given in a non-state language, other information is in the state language; c) instead of the state language, an inscription in a non-state language is placed at the top; d) In front, that is, on the left, there is a non-state language inscription, and then, on the right, there is a state language inscription and others (Program Report, 2017).

Considering that the State Language Department has not yet developed and approved the rules for presenting inscriptions intended for public information in a non-state language (including the language of a national minority), which is provided for in the Organic Law of Georgia "On the State Language" (Georgia, 2015: M.25, p.2), it would be good to add the provisions specified in paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 of Article 25 of the Organic Law of Georgia "On the State Language" to paragraph 2<sup>1</sup> of Article 4 of the Law "On Advertising". Taking into account the above recommendation, Article 4, Paragraph 2<sup>1</sup> of the Law "On Advertising" will take the following form: "Inscriptions on signs throughout the territory of Georgia must be made in the state language, and if desired, they may also be made in a foreign language. The size of the foreign language inscription shall not exceed the size of the inscription made in the state language, and the text made in the state language shall be placed in front of the text made in a non-state language (on the left or top), and the text made in a non-state language – after (on the right or bottom). When presenting text in Georgian, Abkhazian and non-state languages, the Georgian text shall be placed in front (on the left or top), the Abkhazian text – in the center, and the text made in a non-state language – after (on the right or bottom)."

If we take into account that the Organic Law of Georgia "On the State Language" defines a non-state language as any language, other than the state language, that citizens of Georgia and other persons residing in Georgia use in their private or public lives (Article 3, Subsection b), then there is a great increase in foreign-language inscriptions, the creators of which are motivated by various (including religious, ideological or

political) interests in Georgia, and language, as you know, is the most important tool, to put it mildly, in this struggle. As evidence of this, we can also cite the example of Iran, where the Arabic language gradually turned from the language of religious communication into the second most important language of communication (Ramishvili, 2014: 145). For all of this, we consider it appropriate to replace the word “non-state” with the word “international” and formulate this norm as follows: “The text of an announcement, notice, headline, poster, sign, billboard, advertisement, and other visual information intended for public information shall be completed in the state language. If necessary, the relevant information may also be indicated in an international language .....”.

The Organic Law of Georgia “On the State Language” stipulates that when a text written in a non-state language is used together with a text written in the state language, the font of the non-state language text should not be larger than the font of the state language text (Georgia, 2015: M.25, p.6). This requirement of the law is also violated in many cases (Program Report, 2017).

According to the Law of Georgia “On Advertising”, an inscription made in a non-state language should not exceed the inscription made in the state language in size or quantity, “an inscription made in a foreign language should not exceed the (transliterated) form made in the state language in size (in all cases) and quantity (except for television productions)” (Georgia, 1998: Vol. 4, p. 3). Violations of the requirements stipulated in this article are also often observed (Program Report, 2017).

Special attention should be paid to the placement of a trademark (service) mark (logotype) registered in a non-state language in Georgia. The Law of Georgia “On Trademarks” defines a trademark as any symbol or combination of symbols that is entered in the Trademark Register, is clearly and distinctly formulated and has the ability to distinguish the goods and/or services of one enterprise from the goods and/or services of another enterprise (hereinafter referred to as “goods”). A symbol or combination of symbols may be a word(s), name(s), letter(s), digit(s), sound(s), image, color(s), shape of the goods or their packaging (Georgia, 1999: Vol. 3, p. 1-2). This issue is regulated by the Georgian Law “On Advertising”, according to which: “The owner of a trademark (service) mark (logo) registered in another language placed in Georgia is obliged to translate it into Georgian by transliteration” (Georgia, 1998: Vol. 4, p. 2). Therefore, Georgian legislation requires that trademarks (symbols) be translated into Georgian and placed in such a way, which is often not done by brands placed in our country (Program Report, 2017). In relation to commercial associations, entrepreneurs, and institutions registered in Georgia, it would be good to share one Estonian experience: in particular, according to the local “Language Law,” commercial associations, entrepreneurs, and institutions registered in Estonia are obliged to place at least some small, general information in Estonian on their foreign-language websites (Language, 2011: p. 16, p. 4). The appearance of a similar entry in the Organic Law of Georgia “On the State Language” will contribute to the absorption of more space by the Georgian written language and, accordingly, to its successful struggle for survival.

Due to the above-mentioned violations, in Georgian written speech, the functional area of the Georgian language is extremely limited by English, Russian, Turkish, Arabic and other languages. The reduction of the spheres of language realization, as we have mentioned, is considered one of the important symptoms of language death. This indicates that the state language of Georgia - the Georgian language, is critically endangered or not, a language under the threat of this threat. It is noteworthy that the majority of the observed violations stem from ignorance of the relevant legal norms, that is, we are dealing with a low level of legal awareness in this direction, in order to raise which it is necessary: a) to provide the population with more legal information on this issue through various information media; b) to train and retrain advertising producers (advertising companies) and distributors through various types of training.

### **Liability for Violation of the Organic Law of Georgia on the State Language**

Although Chapter 11 of the Organic Law of Georgia “On the State Language”, which consists of two articles (38, 39), is entirely devoted to liability for violation of the Georgian legislation on the state language, it does not define specific liability for violation of the regulations established by law. The law is limited to such a general indication only – for violation of this law, a person shall be liable in accordance with the procedure established by the legislation of Georgia (Georgia, 2015: Article 38) and imposes personal liability on the heads of state and municipal bodies, institutions and organizations for violation of the Georgian legislation on the state language in the sphere subordinate to them (Georgia, 2015: Article 39, paragraph 1). The function of the State Language Department towards violators of the Organic Law “On the State Language” is also limited to general instructions, in particular, the regulation of the State Language Department informs us that in case of violation of the requirements of the Organic Law of Georgia “On the State Language”, the Department shall address the relevant state agencies with a request to apply the measure of responsibility established by the legislation of Georgia to the violator (Public Law, 2017: M.3, subsection k). Despite the efforts of the State Language Department, the effectiveness of its activities still remains one of the main challenges. Unfortunately, its activities are localized and limited (Gegenava, Partsvania, Tusashvili, 2024: 63). As we can see, both the Organic Law “On the State Language” and the regulation of the State Language Department are limited to such general instructions. It would be good if specific sanctions against violators were indicated directly in the text of the law, especially since the draft law on the state language provided for this (Managadze, 2014) and world experience is also familiar with such a practice (Language, 2011: p. 36). If the legislator refrains from establishing new regulations, then it is advisable to at least refer to the relevant norms through a blanket provision, or to transfer the relevant norms unchanged.

Unfortunately, neither the Code of Administrative Offenses of Georgia (Georgia, 1984), nor the Law of Georgia “On Advertising” (Georgia, 1998), nor the Law of Georgia “On Broadcasting” (Georgia, 2004) provide for a separate, special article related to the state language. Although Articles 14410 and 1556 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of Georgia refer to the state language of Georgia, but not in the context discussed in this article on public information. Also, Article 4 of the Law “On Advertising” regulates the issues of the use of the state language, the title of which is “General Requirements for Advertising”, several articles of the Law “On Broadcasting” (Georgia, 2004: M. 381, 511, 58) also regulate the issues of the use of the state language, although the state language is not mentioned in the titles of these articles either. It is very embarrassing when the issues of liability for violation of the rules of public information established by the Organic Law of Georgia “On the State Language” are regulated by regulations intended for advertising and are discussed in Chapter 12 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (Georgia, 1998), which is entitled “Administrative Offenses in the Field of Trade and Finance”, while the Constitution of Georgia declares the state language of Georgia, along with the name, capital, flag, coat of arms and anthem of the state, to be a symbol of the state (Georgia, 1995: p. 2).

**Conclusion.** The Georgian language, as a core element of Georgia’s political-legal and historical-cultural identity, requires sustained protection. Analysis of public information texts demonstrates that, despite an extensive legislative framework, the functional domain of written Georgian is increasingly constrained by foreign-language usage. This trend threatens the effective use, protection, and long-term vitality of the state language.

Violations of state-language requirements in public information arise from three principal factors:

1. low legal awareness among producers of public texts;
2. ambiguities and gaps in legislation;

### 3. absence of clear and effective sanctions.

Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, clarifying legal norms, and expanding awareness-raising measures are therefore essential for ensuring the practical realisation of the constitutional status of the Georgian language.

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